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Notes & Comments: April 2015

Campus inquisition

The Jesuits these days may have a tenuous relation to Catholic orthodoxy, but their traditional expertise in the matter of conducting inquisitions continues in fighting trim. Consider the case of John McAdams, a sixty-nine-year-old associate professor of political science, and the Jesuits at Marquette University ("Be the Difference") in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. McAdams has been suspended from teaching. He has been banned from the campus. And the Jesuits and their lay minions at Marquette are mobilizing the modern tools of inquisition to revoke his tenure and expel him once and for all from an institution that (according to its website) "prepares [students] for the world by asking them to think critically about it."

We'll come back to that risible claim in a moment. First, what do you suppose John McAdams did to warrant the academic equivalent of excommunication? Did he steal money from the Women's and Gender Studies program? Publicly consume gluten on campus? Vote Republican? No, Professor McAdams really violated the canons of civilized behavior. He published a blog post. Yes, that's right. He actually had the temerity to publish an essay on *Marquette Warrior*, his personal weblog, that was critical of a graduate teaching assistant and, even worse, he stood up for a conservative student who disagreed with said teaching assistant about gay marriage.

No wonder mandarins at Marquette are out for McAdams's blood. He trespassed against the one commandment modern academics take seriously: thou shalt not violate politically correct orthodoxy.

Here's what happened. In a philosophy class on ethics, a graduate teaching assistant called Cheryl Abbate asked students to apply ideas from John Rawls's *Theory of Justice* to some modern political controversies. She listed a few subjects on the blackboard, including "gay rights." According to McAdams, she then said that "everybody agrees on this, and there is no need to discuss it." After class, a student approached Abbate and said that he thought the issue worthy of discussion. He argued against gay marriage and gay adoption but was told by Abbate that "some opinions are not appropriate, such as racist opinions, sexist opinions." (How about the outlandish opinion, expressed in Abbate's master's thesis, that, on "utilitarian" grounds, medical research should be conducted not on animals but on prisoners? We gather that's just fine: it doesn't affect anyone on this week's approved list of victims.) The student (who surreptitiously recorded the exchange) objected that it was his right as an American citizen to make such arguments, to which Abbate replied that "you don't have a right in this class to make homophobic comments," noting also that she would "take offense" if the student said that women can't serve in particular roles. She then suggested

that the student drop the class. Which he did. (It was a required class, by the way, so he will have to make it up in the future.)

McAdams's heinous tort was to describe the particulars of this exchange on his weblog and then go on to criticize Abbate's response. "Abbate," he wrote,

> was just using a tactic typical among liberals now. Opinions with which they disagree are not merely wrong, and are not to be argued against on their merits, but are deemed "offensive" and need to be shut up. . . .
>
> Of course, only certain groups have the privilege of shutting up debate. Things thought to be "offensive" to gays, blacks, women and so on must be stifled. Further, it's not considered necessary to actually find out what the group really thinks. "Women" are supposed to feel warred upon when somebody opposes abortion, but in the real world men and women are equally likely to oppose abortion. . . .
>
> But in the politically correct world of academia, one is supposed to assume that all victim groups think the same way as leftist professors.

McAdams ended by observing that, "like the rest of academia, Marquette is less and less a real university. And, when gay marriage cannot be discussed, certainly not a Catholic university."

McAdams's post elicited a vigorous response. Cheryl Abbate received a torrent of comment, some of it supportive, some critical, some rude and abusive. Delicate creature that she is, she has since left Marquette because of the incident. Curious readers should look up her website. A more perfect specimen of wounded vanity and politically correct attitudinizing is hard to come by.

And then there was the response Professor McAdams received from Marquette. *Marquette Warrior* features a disclaimer: "this site has no official connection with Marquette University. Indeed, when university officials find out about it, they will doubtless want it shut down."

And how. Their first step was to suspend him and bar him from the campus. On what grounds? Well might you ask. Peter Bonilla of FIRE—the indispensable Foundation for Individual Rights in Education—has detailed the contemptible, kangaroo-court travesty of justice meted out by the craven administration of Marquette at thefire.org. It's been a goulash of overheated rhetoric long on nebulous charges of harassment and very short on due process and substance. On December 17, Michael R. Lovell, Marquette's president, issued a statement about McAdams's suspension: "As stated in our harassment policy, the university will not tolerate personal attacks or harassment of or by students, faculty and staff." Yes, OK. But where was the personal attack or harassment?

At the end of January, Marquette's dean, Richard C. Holz, sent a letter to McAdams notifying him that the university was commencing the process of stripping him of tenure and dismissing him. It is a remarkable and depressing document, full of wild, irrelevant accusations, disingenuous posturing, and the lowest species of Jesuitical casuistry. "[F]aculty members," Holz wrote, "have voiced concerns about how they could become targets in your blog based upon items they might choose to include in a class syllabus. Your conduct thus impairs the very freedoms of teaching and expression that you vehemently purport to promote." Hello? As Peter Bonilla observes, "This is a preposterous argument, yet again asserting a nonexistent right to be free of criticism, under which one can claim a rights violation simply because another person spoke his or her mind."

It gets worse. Holz went on to argue that Professor McAdams "knew or should have known that [his] Internet story would result in vulgar, vile, and threatening communications" and that he thus bore responsibility for the criticism Cheryl Abbate received. Again, Peter Bonilla is right: the argument is ridiculous. "If bloggers like McAdams become vicariously liable for what others say or do in response to their writing," Bonilla observes, "free speech as we know it ceases to exist."

Of course, that may well be the point: to stamp out free expression and vigorous debate. Particularly disgusting in this star-chamber proceeding against John McAdams is the pretense of high-

mindedness. In a statement released on February 4, President Lovell said that Marquette's proceedings against McAdams "have everything to do with . . . guiding values and expectations of conduct toward each other" and "nothing to do" with academic freedom or freedom of speech. In fact, as that contemptible apparatchik well knows, it has everything to do with academic freedom and freedom of expression.

Like most American institutions of higher education these days, Marquette is Janus-faced when it comes to free speech. Their public-relations, fund-raising face proclaims their commitment to academic freedom and an environment that "prepares [students] for the world by asking them to think critically about it." Tuition dollars and annual-fund checks safely docketed, the workaday, totalitarian face takes over. Only opinions that pass today's politically correct test of orthodoxy are allowed. "Thinking critically" means repudiating anything not on the approved list of PC attitudes.

As of this writing, the fate of John McAdams at Marquette is still up in the air. As a private institution, Marquette need not offer the same sort of Frist Amendment protection as a public institution. FIRE has argued in meticulous detail that the university has violated its own policies in its campaign to rid itself of John McAdams. McAdams has engaged legal counsel and, who knows, perhaps he will prevail. We hope he does, though, frankly, we wouldn't be surprised if he left anyway. Why would anyone not thoroughly marinated in the politically correct nostrums of the moment wish to study or teach at a sclerotic, intolerant institution like Marquette? Unfortunately, that same disease is endemic in the culture of so-called higher education in this country. Commentators like Glenn Reynolds are right: there is a bubble in higher education, partly economic, but partly spiritual. Our colleges and universities, though they can't stop shouting about "diversity," are pathetic bastions of intellectual and moral conformity. It will come to an end, but not before many more John McAdamses are ostracized for the sin of speaking out against the ideology of intolerance darkening the educational establishment.

Meanwhile, at Wesleyan . . .

One of the great curiosities of contemporary academic life is the way intolerance for diversity of thought and expression goes hand in hand with a terrified embrace of the most exotic forms of sexual exhibitionism. It's as if academic administrators had seized simultaneously on George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* as how-to manuals for creating the university of their dreams. Someday, the glorious future might come when every student and every teacher believes and says exactly the same, approved things, and yet entertains each other with the sort of polymorphous perversity and "primary narcissism" that the Marxist Freudian Herbert Marcuse extolled in his counter-cultural bible *Eros and Civilization*. Places like Marquette have made a good start on the former: today they are purging John McAdams, tomorrow, Gaia willing, they will have a university that is utterly free of "offending" opinions or robust criticism. As for the latter, it would be hard to beat the academic cesspool that is Wesleyan University. Some years ago, we had occasion in this space to comment on Wesleyan's "interdisciplinary" class on pornography, which lovingly attended to the "so-called ["so-called"?] perverse practices such as voyeurism, bestiality, sadism, and masochism, and considers the inflections of the dominant white-heterosexual tradition," etc., etc. This expensive alternative to higher education has been making great strides to battle the "dominant white-heterosexual tradition." Their latest initiative? A "safe space" (i.e., a dormitory) for students of the LGBTTQQFAGPBDSM "community": that is, students who identify themselves as "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Queer, Questioning, Flexual, Asexual, Genderfuck, Polyamourous, Bondage/Disciple, Dominance/Submission, Sadism/Masochism and"—just for completeness—"people of sexually or gender dissident communities." It's beyond parody, of course, but not beyond a tuition, room, and board bill of $62,736 *per annum*.

Pound's Metro
by William Logan

As he recalled it,

> I got out of a train at, I think, La Concorde and in the jostle I saw a beautiful face, and then, turning suddenly, another and another, and then a beautiful child's face, and then another beautiful face. All that day I tried to find words for what this made me feel. That night as I went home along the rue Raynouard I was still trying. I could get nothing but spots of colour. I remember thinking that if I had been a painter I might have started a wholly new school of painting. . . . Only the other night, wondering how I should tell the adventure, it struck me that in Japan, where a work of art is not estimated by its acreage and where sixteen syllables are counted enough for a poem if you arrange and punctuate them properly, one might make a very little poem which would be translated about as follows:—
>
> > "The apparition of these faces in the crowd :
> > Petals on a wet, black bough."
>
> —"How I Began," *T.P.'s Weekly*, June 6, 1913

Early in March 1911, Ezra Pound arrived in Paris. By late May he had moved on. The specters in the Métro obviously haunted him. The lines were finished by fall the following year, when he sent *Poetry* a batch of poems that, he hoped, would "help to break the surface of convention." When these "Contemporania" were published at the head of the April 1913 issue, the poem appeared in this fashion:

> In a Station of the Metro
>
> The apparition of these faces in the crowd :
> Petals on a wet, black bough .

The first thing striking about the couplet is the subject—beauty discovered underground. In the previous century, Turner in *Rain, Steam, and Speed—The Great Western Railway* (1844) and Monet in his views of *Gare Saint-Lazare* (1877) had brought the railroad to painting, but it would be hard to call the results traditional. Turner's oil is a little terrifying—a rabbit flushed from cover dashes ahead of the locomotive—while Monet's frontal portraits of ironclad leviathans are steamy visions. The works resemble fever dreams, suggesting how difficult it is for the artist to venture outside the approved list of salon subjects. To do so is to court rejection—but not to do so lets art fossilize the taste of the past.

The material culture of poetry often lags a generation behind the world outside. The shock of modernity in Pound's couplet has faded, but it's jarring to compare what he was writing before that fateful encounter in the Métro. In *Ripostes* (1912): "When I behold how black, immortal ink/ Drips from my deathless pen—ah, well-away!" and "Golden rose the house, in the portal I saw/ thee, a marvel, carven in subtle stuff." A smattering of modern diction seeps in elsewhere, but Pound's imagination had been steeped in Victorian vagaries, with a weakness for the long-baked poeticisms of "'twould" and "'twas," of "hath"

and "'neath" and "ye" and "thou," the language of Nineveh reconstructed from torn-up pages of the King James Version. Pound's English resembles the appalling translations of Gilbert Murray, which should have killed off interest in Greek tragedy forever.

The most dramatic poem in the book is Pound's faux-barbarian version of "The Seafarer"—rough-hewn, archaisms for once used to effect, the weatherbeaten rhythms of alliterative Anglo-Saxon smuggled into a premodern English that never existed. The poem looks forward to Pound's experiments with Chinese translation in *Cathay* (1914), which inaugurated the idiom in which he did his best work—no longer burdened by nineteenth-century haberdashery, he found a verse line adequate to his rough inflections.

It was at the end of *Ripostes*, in his prefatory note to "The Complete Poetical Works of T. E. Hulme," that Pound coined the term *Les Imagistes*. Innocent readers may have thought Hulme just as much a figment of imagination as Hugh Selwyn Mauberly, Pound's later alter ego. We probably owe to the Englishman (and not just to his example of plain speech, carved image) Pound's interest in Japanese and Chinese verse. The spring after the American arrived in London in 1908, he joined the Poets' Club—Hulme, the secretary, reminded Pound of a Yorkshire farmer. F. S. Flint later remembered that members had written "dozens" of haiku "as an amusement. . . . In all this Hulme was ringleader." Hulme, who died in the war, helped bring the American's medievalism up short. (Ford Madox Ford was another bluff influence. On reading Pound's *Canzoni* [1911], he rolled about the floor, presumably howling the while at the preposterously stilted English.) Pound was sometimes slow to change—after 1920, there was an increasing refusal to change—but during a crucial decade he could be goaded into brilliance.

From such accidents and oddments, such stray collisions as his repeated perusal in 1912 and 1913 of ukiyo-e prints in the British Museum, Pound manufactured his new style. Only the month before "In a Station of the Metro" appeared, his fellow traveler Flint had contributed the article "Imagisme" to *Poetry*, a manifesto for the new poetry Pound was promoting:

> 1. Direct treatment of the "thing," whether subjective or objective.
> 2. To use absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation.
> 3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome.

Pound added dicta of his own, "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste," which elaborated the orders of battle, among them:

> Use no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal something.
>
> Don't use such an expression as "dim lands of *peace*." It dulls the image. It mixes an abstraction with the concrete. It comes from the writer's not realizing that the natural object is always the *adequate* symbol.
>
> Go in fear of abstractions. Don't retell in mediocre verse what has already been done in good prose. Don't think any intelligent person is going to be deceived when you try to shirk all the difficulties of the unspeakably difficult art of good prose by chopping your composition into line lengths.
>
> Use either no ornament or good ornament.

The minor vogue and rapid extinction of Imagism, a movement whose influence we still feel, has been hashed over by literary critics for a century. Its rehearsal here is merely to bring the poem into focus within the slow progress toward the densities of language, the images like copperplate engraving, that made Pound Pound.

When you read Pound's early poems book by book, his transformation is the more remarkable. In *Personae* (1926), which collected poems published before *The Cantos*, he pared his apprentice work of many of its embarrassments, almost a hundred of them. The poems absent are rarely as good as those he chose to keep, though the latter have the young Pound's

same brash overreaching; the varnished diction ("Holy Odd's bodykins!" "a fool that mocketh his drue's disdeign"); the curious tone with contrary modes of sap-headed ardor and bristling hostility; and the contempt for modern life, cast into antique dialect (no other modern poet started as a contemporary of Chaucer). The worst of the discarded are deaf to their own high comedy: "Lord God of heaven that with mercy dight/ Th' alternate prayer wheel of the night and light," and "Yea sometimes in a bustling man-filled place/ Me seemeth somewise thy hair wandereth/ Across my eyes." It took a long while for Pound to practice his preaching—he saw the direction for English poetry before he could follow it. Though he never entirely shook off the archaic trappings and the high romance of the troubadours, Imagism taught him to focus on image and let it whisper meanings he'd been shouting, *Sturm und Drang* style, with a bushel of exclamation marks attached.

The mechanics for change were in place; then came the occasion, the letter from Harriet Monroe, editor of the newly launched *Poetry* ("I strongly hope that you may be interested in this project for a magazine of verse and that you may be willing to send us a group of poems"). Pound initially gave her a couple of poems lying on the desk, but the opportunity was too tempting to squander. Monroe was a dreadful poet and a conventional editor, but Pound saw the advantage of becoming the magazine's house cat—he had immediately granted her exclusive rights to his verse and agreed to become *Poetry*'s foreign correspondent. Monroe gave him a toehold among American literary magazines; he in turn provided access to the avant-garde abroad. The literary cities of the day were still Boston and New York. A magazine devoted only to poetry and founded in the uncultured heartlands not far from the Great American Desert was a novelty.

The best things in *Poetry*'s first years were the poems by Pound, Eliot, Frost, and Yeats, as well as Pound's hammer-and-tongs prose—Pound brought the others into the fold. In the fall of 1912, only a couple of months after the letter, he offered Monroe the job lot of "Contemporania." (That he briefly considered calling the series "March Hare" suggests his intentions both whimsical and provocative.) In March came the articles on Imagism, the theory. Then at last, the next month, "Contemporania."

"In a Station of the Metro" is the rare instance of a poem whose drafts, had they survived, might retain the fossil traces of a complete change of manner, from gaslit poeticism to the world of electric lighting and underground rail. "Contemporania" showed Pound's first acquaintance with the modern age, with the deft gliding of registers, the slither between centuries of diction, that made virtue of vice: "Dawn enters with little feet/ like a gilded Pavlova," "Like a skein of loose silk blown against a wall/ She walks by the railing of a path in Kensington Gardens," "Go to the bourgeoise who is dying of her ennuis,/ Go to the women in suburbs." (In American poetry, it has never hurt to knock the suburbs.) His embrace of the modern is not a rupture with the past (there is antiquarian fussiness enough), but an acknowledgment that the past underlies the present, that present and past live in sharp and troubled relation. "In a Station of the Metro" is the final poem of the group.

At the beginning of his most productive years (roughly 1912–1930), Pound might as well have been a medieval troubadour yanked into the modern world. When he describes the woman in Kensington Gardens, he remarks, "Round about there is a rabble/ Of the filthy, sturdy, unkillable infants of the very poor"—it's not clear whether this judgment betrays her prejudice or his Swiftian realism (or not so real, since infants of the poor died in droves). Already a slight embarrassment clings to the earlier poems. Addressing them, he admits, "I was twenty years behind the times/ so you found an audience ready."

Pound's biographer Humphrey Carpenter called "Contemporania" a "blast to announce the appearance of a new circus-act," the poems "written in a hurry and to fill a gap." Pound himself referred to their "ultra-modern, ultra-effete tenuity"—and these "modern" poems, as he called them elsewhere, were quickly parodied by Richard Aldington, among others. Pound must have thought better of them, because he

included a few in his *Catholic Anthology* (1915) and all but one in *Lustra* (1916). It would hardly have been the first time a writer, lashing out against his contemporaries, found the way forward. Pound's genius, when he was young, was as restless as Picasso's. Ambition is gasoline.

"In a Station of the Metro"

A title is not usually the first line of a poem. It may exist in tenuous or digressive proximity to what follows, at times merely the equivalent of an easel card propped to one side of the stage, or the placard flourished by a bikini-clad model between rounds of a fight. The title may tell us merely where we are, or how far along. Here it flows seamlessly into the first line, but its status, like so many features of the poem, remains ambiguous. "In a Station of the Metro" was, as a title, a challenge to an aesthetic that would not have seen as poetry a poem set in such unromantic surrounds. The history of poetry has repeatedly been the march of the unpoetic into the poetic.

After the title, the first presence is almost an absence—apparitions are neither here nor there but halfway between two worlds, between seen and unseen, appearance and disappearance. The link to the supernatural is as old as the word—it first described a ghost, employing a term used in Latin of servants, whose presence could be summoned. The degrees of meaning spread from the reappearance of a star after occultation to the appearance of the infant Christ to the Magi, also called the Epiphany. These faces call up the shades of the *Odyssey*, where the dead Elpenor is referred to by the Greek word "eidolon," a specter or phantasm. The dead live in darkness, and if you attempt to hold them they fade from your hands, insubstantial, "like a shadow/ or a dream" (Lattimore translation, XI, 207–8).

Pound's recollection of the Métro would have been more or less vivid when recorded for *T.P.'s Weekly* in June, 1913. Setting down that moment a year later for the *Fortnightly Review*, he added new details:

> I wrote a thirty-line poem, and destroyed it because it was what we call work "of second intensity." Six months later I made a poem half that length ; a year later I made the following *hokku*-like sentence :—
>
> "The apparition of these faces in the crowd :
> Petals, on a wet, black bough."

Pound was enough of a classicist, and a showman, to know the advantage of arriving in medias res—indeed, there is scarcely another way to start when the end is almost the beginning. Those passengers drifting by are not revenants, but they rise from the gloom of the underground station. The old-fashioned spaces before semi-colons and colons affect the text of the poem. (Such spaces have elsewhere been removed where Pound's prose is quoted.) Note the introduction after "petals" of a comma soon to vanish again.

The Métro had opened scarcely a decade before, during the Paris World Fair in the summer of 1900. The trains ran on electric motors, and the electric lighting on the platforms provided artificial daylight. London's underground stations had been choked by the steam and sulphurous coal-smoke of engines that scattered cinders on the waiting crowds. One man remarked on the "smell of smoke, the oily, humid atmosphere of coal gas, the single jet of fog-dimmed light in the roof of the railway carriage, which causes the half-illumined passengers to look like wax figures in a 'Chamber of Horrors.'" An American, aghast at the "sulphurous smoke" that left the London stations "filled with noxious fumes," reported that doctors treated passengers afflicted with "headache and nausea." Those wax figures give us an idea of what Pound saw.

Paris was lighter and cleaner. Still, standard bulbs were weaker then, and houses brightly lit compared to the days of candlelight and gas jets would seem a miasma now. Early photographs of Métro stations show a shadowy realm barely interrupted by the glow of ceiling fixtures (the exposures perhaps required would have made the scene lighter than ordinary). There is a witness. In September 1911, a few months after Pound's visitation, another traveler came to Paris and recorded in his diary that "in spite of the electric lights you can

definitely see the changing light of day in the stations; you notice it immediately after you've walked down, the afternoon light particularly, just before it gets dark." This was Franz Kafka. Had the day been rainy, the station would have been even darker.

A crowd is the city's signature, especially for those from the country. Recall Wordsworth on London, a century before:

> How oft, amid those overflowing streets,
> Have I gone forward with the crowd, and said
> Unto myself, "The face of every one
> That passes by me is a mystery!"
>
> *Prelude* (1850), VII, 626–9

This is nearly the experience of "In a Station of the Metro"—but recall, too, Eliot's Dantesque London a few years later: "A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,/ I had not thought death had undone so many." Pound's vision occured in a "jostle," he says, but the poem is all stillness, a freeze frame as static as haiku.

The interiors of most early stations, including La Concorde, were lined with chamfered white tiles, highly glazed—these scattered the light and in photographs give the interior a watery look. Pound's poem depends on the daylight above the darkness below, not least because a visit to the underworld is a visit to the dead. Readers would have known the journey of Odysseus in *Odyssey* XI (the *Nekuia*), or of Aeneas in *Aeneid* VI. The ritual slaughter of sheep, whose blood drew the dead to Odysseus, must already have been ancient when Homer composed his verses.

The comparison to petals is stark, but the gists and hints go deeper, as well as the sense of loss. The classic haiku demands a reference to season taken from a time-honored list—perhaps Pound knew that much. (How well he knew Japanese verse is moot, since he apparently believed haiku required, recall, sixteen syllables and punctuation.) However the scene occurred in the lost longer drafts of the poem, through the pair of striking images he may have come to this brief form. Pound's construction of the series was fluid and contingent, but on one point he told Monroe he was adamant: "There's got to be a certain amount of pictures to ballance [*sic*] the orations, and there's got to be enough actual print to establish the tonality."

The intention of the image is plain—beyond the scatter of blossom lies transience. In his second reminiscence, Pound says he "saw suddenly a beautiful face, and then another and another, and then a beautiful child's face, and then another beautiful woman." The beauty of petals—roughly oval, like faces—lasts but a week; the faces in the Métro are like those of the dead, the lives however long too short in retrospect. Indeed, the dead never age. In the underworld, young women remain beautiful; children, children.

Despite the faint tincture of the classics, Pound's petals seem immediately present. In the Paris spring, these might have been the palest pink of cherry blossoms or the rouge-tinted white of plum. Cherry trees may have been blooming in the Jardin des Tuileries above the station. "A wet, black bough": *bough* here, therefore probably a tree, though "boughs of roses" is not unknown. In a minor poem from *Exultations* (1909), "Laudantes Decem Pulchritudinis Johannae Templi," Pound praised the "perfect faces which I see at times/ When my eyes are closed—/ Faces fragile, pale, yet flushed a little, like petals of roses." The image was in the warehouse.

Pound would have left the Métro in sight of the giant red-granite obelisk erected in the long octagonal square by King Louis-Philippe in 1829, less than forty years after it had served as the site of the guillotine. There Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, Robespierre, and Danton met their deaths. Known as Place de la Révolution during the Terror, the square was afterward renamed, not without the luxury of irony.

Blossoms wither and fade, lives wither and fade. Those visions in the Métro, so casually encountered, might have been at the peak of a beauty that death, like art, would arrest, had arrested. The poem depends on the electric shock of seeing the bloom of such faces in the murk underground. That's the point. Beauty rises here from the sordid darkness, a motif familiar from Aristotle's notion that

life emerged spontaneously from rotting flesh. The poem works that ground between nature and civilization, country and city, pastoral and metropolitan. The dunghill vs. harmony. The *Georgics* vs. the *Aeneid*. Pound built the image out of the clash of prejudices. Paris of course had its own underground city of the dead—the Catacombs, whose entrance lay on what had been known as Hell Street (Rue d'Enfer). The poet stayed at a pension no great distance away when he arrived in Paris in 1911.

Pound noted in "A Few Don'ts" that "An 'Image' is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. . . . It is the presentation of such a 'complex' instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art." Pound was unusual in being able to examine, almost with calipers, what he was doing—and what he intended to do. The poem here is theory writ small, or theory is the poem writ large.

The juxtaposition of images binds the worlds together as much as it holds them apart. This is Pound's *phanopoeia* at its most basic. The beauty exists in eternal confrontation with the squalid, but it is beautiful in part because of that squalor. After Pound, there was not a poet who could requisition the power of such images until Geoffrey Hill. Pound's crucial critical idea of the period, applied directly to translation, was the distinction between *melopoeia*, "words . . . charged, over and above their plain meaning, with some musical property"; *phanopoeia*, a "casting of images upon the visual imagination"; and *logopoeia*, the "'dance of the intellect among words.'" He used the term *melopoeia* at least as early as 1921.

The image, however exact physically, trembles with ambiguity. Do the faces look wet in the liquid light of the Métro? Was it raining above, the passengers having rushed into the darkened station from a shower? (That Pound mentions only women and a child among the faces suggests that this might be late afternoon, the women having spent the day in the gardens above, perhaps driven into the subway by the rains.) Are the petals from blossoms torn apart by spring rain, stuck to the wet bough, to fall when the sun returns? Or are they blossoms freshly opened in clusters along a branch? Pound's familiarity with ukiyo-e prints might indicate sprays of cherry or plum blossom (Hokusai and Hiroshige contributed important examples), but seeing one face after another suggests solitary petals. Pound likely had a single thought in mind, not two—such minor puzzles the reader must hold at bay. Some of the disconcerting play embedded in the poem lies between the static and dynamic terms of the image: petals pasted in stillness or clusters buffeted by a breeze. If the exact date mattered, as it does not, amid the usual showers of early spring in 1911 Paris had two prolonged periods of heavy rain, March 12–18 and April 27–29. It's merely idle speculation, but idle speculation is not the worst way to attack a poem, so long as it is no more than that.

What of the black bough? Perhaps the gloom suggested it. (The thicker the crowd, the fainter the light.) The atmosphere, dark enough already, would have been filled with the smoke of men indulging in pipes or cigarettes. Yet the original Métro cars had been made of dark varnished wood. Though some still ran on other lines, those no longer passed through La Concorde. The new metal-clad cars, however, had been painted brown (later deep green) in imitation of the wooden models; it's not clear if Pound could have seen the difference in the Stygian darkness of the station. (Kafka: "The dark color of the steel sides of the cars predominated.") That might have been enough, had Pound seen the faces against the dark backdrop of the wooden cars, or what he recollected as wood.

Aeneas's descent into the Underworld through the wide-mouthed cavern of Avernus might also lie behind the image of Pound's half-lit station. The art-deco entrances built for the Métro, of which many examples remain, feature two tall curving posts like spindly flower stalks, each topped by a small red lamp. Mark Ovenden remarks in *Paris Underground* that these lamps "were said to look like the Devil's eyes at night; the steps of Hades down his throat leading to the belly of the beast!"

Unfortunately, Ovenden cannot recall the source; and the most knowledgeable historian of the Métro, Julian Pepinster, does not think the comparison was ever made. It is suggestive but, alas, likely unhistorical.

The entrance to La Concorde did not possess these spiry posts. (Pound would have entered elsewhere.) It was scarcely less gloomy, however. In a photograph of 1914, the entrance appears as a shadowy arched mouth cut into a stone facade along the border of the Tuileries, the sign METROPOLITAIN capped by five small bulbs, probably red, to cast light upon it through the dark. There, if we take him at his word, Pound would have emerged from the underworld.

The poet, given his turn of mind, might have recalled another passage in the *Aeneid*—where Aeneas rode Charon's ferry across the Styx. The trains come and go, as endlessly as the ferry of the dead. Perhaps Pound recalled the sulphurous atmosphere of the London Underground, not completely electrified even then. Until bridges and subways were built, the ferry remained the common carriage across water in all cities of water—London, Paris, New York. If we take the journey of the dead further, the pale-faced figures would be the newly dead rushing to board—Pound saw them pressing toward him in the crowd. Other myths muscle in, especially the eternal return of Persephone (invoked in Pound's Canto I, a reworking of the *Nekuia* episode). Surely, had the Métro traveler a tutelary goddess, it would be she.

Pound's tone is nondescript, almost clerical, a notation of image complex in demand and reservation. There's something of the awe beauty disposes, or leaves in its wake—his hypnotic transfixion has been transferred to the petals. The anonymous *flâneur* explains nothing (he gives no motive for his appearance, because the moment does not require motive)—if you didn't sense the ghostly quality of these presences (ghostly, not ghastly), his remark would not be far removed from forensic. He's merely the medium of impression, the words that give voice to image. One of the poem's quiet gestures is that it lets the title establish the surrounds. Pound's longer recollection registered the stir and arrest of this accidental scene: "In a poem of this sort one is trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective." Eliot's idea of the objective correlative, which bears a filial relation, was not mentioned until his essay "Hamlet and His Problems" in 1919.

The neutrality of voice perhaps owes something to Pound's stray reading of Oriental translation, though his deeper interest in Chinese poetry came only in the fall of 1913, after he met the widow of the scholar Ernest Fenollosa, who gave the poet his papers. Still, Pound had arrived in Europe toward the end of half a century of Japonisme ushered in by Commodore Perry's expedition of 1853–1854. That the poet spent time looking at ukiyo-e prints was no odder than his taste for painters like Whistler, that chronic bohemian, on whom the Japanese influence was marked.

Translation accounted for the simplicity and directness of Imagism. The poet had in effect thought in an alien language, a tongue he did not know, and translated back to English.

Rhythm

In the *Fortnightly Review* memoir, after remarks similar to those on "spots of colour," Pound added: "It was just that—a 'pattern,' or hardly a pattern, if by 'pattern' you mean something with a 'repeat' in it. But it was a word, the beginning, for me, of a language in colour." He was not referring to rhythm here, but his thoughts on rhythm align in rudimentary form with this moment. (*Melopoeia*, as he says in *ABC of Reading* [1934], is where "language charged with meaning" succeeds in "inducing emotional correlations by the sound and rhythm of the speech.") He continues, in the expanded reminiscence, "I do not mean that I was unfamiliar with the kindergarten stories about colours being like tones in music. I think that sort of thing is nonsense. If you try to make notes permanently correspond with particular colours, it is like tying narrow meanings to symbols." There he rejects the relevance of Baudelairean synaesthesia.

Pound certainly had rhythm in mind when he typed out the poem for Harriet Monroe.

> The apparition of these faces in the crowd :
> Petals on a wet, black bough .

These spaces might be called phrasal pauses, except the last, which provides emphasis or suspense after "black." Monroe must have questioned Pound about rhythm, because he replied with a salvo: "I'm deluded enough to think there is a rhythmic system in the d[amned] stuff, and I believe I was careful to type it as I wanted it written, i.e., as to line ends and breaking *and capitals*." Recall the odd comma after "petals" in the version Pound published in *Fortnightly Review* in 1914. The phrasal pauses are gone, but he couldn't quite let go—that comma is the last remnant of a missing space.

The spaces before colon and period might be thought similar to pauses in reading at the end of a line or a sentence (you cannot hear punctuation, not accurately, with perhaps one exception, the question mark). These spaces, however, had no significance—they are simply a mistake, or perhaps better an artifact. Pound was following an old typographer's convention throughout the manuscripts and typescripts of "Contemporania." The convention had not entirely vanished in print—you see spaces before all major stops except the period in the original edition of *Gaudier-Brzeska*, as in the *Fortnightly Review* article that preceded it.

Such rhythms would have been more difficult to enforce before the invention of the typewriter—the typewriter was Pound's piano. He liked to think of himself as a composer, though his work in that line was not a success—he had a tin ear, and a tin voice. His longest composition, the one-act opera *Le Testament*, is an agony of droning. Pound added, in his salvo, "In the 'Metro' hokku, I was careful, I think, to indicate spaces between the rhythmic units, and I want them observed."

Pound's colored "pattern" has only a sidelong reference to music. Still, there he came as close as anyone to a definition of free verse: free-verse rhythm, too, is not a "pattern," not something with a "repeat." (A pattern without a repeat, Pound might have said, meant that poetry should not look like wallpaper.) We are returned to Flint's notes on Imagism: "As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome." Pound's disruptive idea of rhythm almost demanded that he break the phrasing after "black"—he could not require this without spacing, but when he printed the poem in *Catholic Anthology* he gave up trying to bully the reader. That he had such a rhythm in mind tells us about the poem; that he was willing to abandon the notation tells us about Pound.

The analysis of rhythm does not often consider the length of words or the shift in parts of speech. To chart these things and superimpose them must be clumsy, but if we include the title the map might run:

> *x* x *N*-N *x* x *N*-N
>
> x *N*-N-*N*-N *x* x *N*-N *x* x *N*
> *N*-N *x* x *A A N*

where x = articles, prepositions, pronouns, demonstrative adjectives; A = adjectives; and N = nouns. (Polysyllables are hyphenated, metrical stress italicized.) What can we learn from the lines' DNA? That most nouns appear in the strong positions at the beginning and end of lines, their force amplified by the string of monosyllables at line end, like a series of drum taps. The monosyllabic nouns are more dramatic, and more dramatically placed, than those longer. The rhythm of meter is augmented by the rhythm of syllables. (It should be noted that the meter of the final line mirrors but truncates the meter of the title.)

In *Lustra* (1916), the poet replaced colon with semi-colon. (That even here a space precedes the punctuation at the end of the first line of "In a Station" should not be taken as a sign that Pound cared. It was not lost in *Personae* until the revised edition of 1990.) The colon surrenders the pale faces to the petals; the semi-colon juxtaposes them in equal and trembling rapport. The colon is a

compass direction; the semi-colon a long rest, a musical notation. Pound considered the images superimposed ("The 'one image poem' is a form of super-position, that is to say, it is one idea set on top of another. I found it useful in getting out of the impasse in which I had been left by my metro emotion.") Call it a jump cut at its sharpest, at its gentlest a dissolve, that technique so beloved of early cinema—Pound's era. He was thinking of film in that later reminiscence: "The logical end of impressionist art is the cinematograph," that is, the motion-picture camera.

As Pound says about the moment of discovery, in the *Fortnightly Review* memoir, "I do not mean that I found words, but there came an equation . . . not in speech, but in little splotches of colour." He must have felt in the early version of the poem that he had to direct the reader's eye from one thing to the other. Later, he was satisfied to nestle the images side by side. The lack of a verb leaves the tenor and ratio of comparison to the reader, as in haiku. The virtue of the sentence fragment is the unease produced when the verb is denied—however this seems to those fluent in Japanese, in English the verb is the absent guest longing to appear. Elijah.

To think of the petals as notes, lined up along the musical staff of a bough, takes the metaphor beyond its bounds, but, had the words scattered along the line struck Pound as a series of notes, the spaced phrases completed the rhythm of notation. The spacing perhaps prevents the reader from realizing that both lines are iambic, an alexandrine followed by acephalic tetrameter. The tension between iambic rhythm and the rhythm of phrasing gives the poem its motive tension. (The device was frequently used by Frost.) The iambics continue, the phrasings interrupt and stutter. When the poem appeared last in the series of "Contemporania," the pauses at line end must have seemed more emphatic, lingering, final.

The stamp or impression of "In a Station" would not remain so vivid without indirection. The best of Pound's early work lies not in medieval ventriloquism or harangue, but in his new taste for implication. The best example of the method comes from *Cathay* in "The Jewel Stairs' Grievance," his translation of a poem by Li Po (now usually Li Bai):

> The jewelled steps are already quite white with dew,
> It is so late that the dew soaks my gauze stockings,
> And I let down the crystal curtain
> And watch the moon through the clear autumn.

Working from the scholar Ernest Fenollosa's notes, Pound called the poet Rihaku, as he was known in Japan. (Fenollosa had studied the Chinese poems with Japanese teachers.) The poem seems slight, but, as he did for no other poem in the short pamphlet, Pound added an instruction manual.

> Note.—Jewel stairs, therefore a palace. Grievance, therefore there is something to complain of. Gauze stockings, therefore a court lady, not a servant who complains. Clear autumn, therefore he has no excuse on account of weather. Also she has come early, for the dew has not merely whitened the stairs, but has soaked her stockings. The poem is especially prized because she utters no direct reproach.

The cunning is worthy of Sherlock Holmes. (Even Pound felt so—when he analyzed the poem in "Chinese Poetry," he remarked, "You can play Conan Doyle if you like.") The original poem is not in code, but it depends on knowledge of Chinese poetry, including, as Wai-lim Yip notes in *Ezra Pound's "Cathay"*, the genre of court poetry it imitated. (If Pound, as Yip argues, did not recognize the genre, he made inspired guesses. Holmes, again.) The inductive method, placing the necessities of interpretation entirely upon the reader, had been crucial to "In a Station of the Metro." This is undoubtedly part of what Pound meant by *logopoeia*—the "dance of the intellect among words."

The claims of implication, of mysteries deciphered, were developed in even scrappier fashion in "Papyrus," Pound's interpretation

of a bit of parchment containing fragmentary remains of a poem by Sappho. Pound used only the beginning three lines:

Spring . . . . . .
Too long . . . . . .
Gongula . . . . . .

Gongula (more accurately, Gongyla) is a woman's name. The Romantic idea of the fragment, the partial whole, found purchase here (recall "Kubla Khan"), though Pound's translation of the first two fragmentary lines has been sharply disputed. The question is not, is this a love poem, but does a love poem require more?

There remains the mystery of what provoked Pound, bedeviled by the scene in the Métro, to the comparison. In "Piccadilly" (1909), he'd written of "beautiful, tragical faces" and "delicate, wistful faces"—he was drawn to beauty like a pre-Raphaelite dauber. More than a little of the pre-Raphaelite survives in *Lustra*. Consider, among many examples, the "eyes of the very beautiful/ Normande cocotte" in "Pagani's, November 8"—another louche charmer, another chance encounter.

Was there any shade who might have haunted him during the long revision of the poem? Perhaps. On an earlier visit to Paris in 1910, he had met Margaret Cravens, the American bohemian who became his patron. She killed herself with a revolver in June 1912. Her death long troubled her friends, and some mistakenly believed that she had been in love with Pound. He wrote an elegy for her (later titled "Post Mortem Conspectu") that was intended for the group of "Contemporania," though he withdrew it and published it elsewhere.

The incident in the Métro occurred over a year before Cravens's suicide, but we know from his accounts that Pound revised a long while before his revelation that the inciting moment in all its affliction could be compressed to two images. (The "*hokku*-like sentence" occurred to him as early as the spring before her suicide, or in the months after.) This Parisian ghost might have stalked Pound while he was whittling away the original version. Like Ajax turning from Odysseus in the Underworld, nursing his old grievance, the figures in the Métro do not say a word: "'So I spoke. He gave no answer, but went off after/ the other souls of the perished dead men, into the darkness'" (*Odyssey* XI, 563–4, Lattimore translation). Kafka remarked, "Métro system does away with speech; you don't have to speak either when you pay or when you get in and out."

Years later, Cravens's death is recalled in Canto 77 ("O Margaret of the seven griefs/ who hast entered the lotus"), where Pound invoked the land of the dead, later mentioning the lotus again, the flower associated with her in his elegy. Then: "we who have passed over Lethe." There was much to forget. It might be tempting to recall the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice—another journey to the underworld to rescue someone dear, and a failure. That presses the possibilities too far. The archeology of image is difficult, and the critic can do little more than scatter a few suggestions relevant to the poet's state of mind, insofar as such a transient thing can be explored at all. The poem does not need Cravens to conjure up the passage through the underworld. If the ghostly faces are the faces of the dead, they steal a little beauty from the petals. If they are the faces of the living, they borrow transience. As apparitions they may be both.

There could have been a more lingering cause for Pound to be thinking of the dead. One evening in 1903, a fire caused by a train's short-circuited motor filled the tunnels and Couronnes station with smoke. The lights were extinguished; passengers wandered in darkness, dying along the platform and at a neighboring station. Eighty-four were killed. Pound had visited Paris in 1906, when memory of the fire would still have been fresh. Perhaps he had heard of it. The pale faces crowded along the platform may be an eerie reminder of those who had died underground.

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Jonson for all time
by Paul Dean

Reviewing Ian Donaldson's life of Ben Jonson in *The New Criterion* of April 2012, I noted that a new edition of Jonson's complete works was forthcoming from Cambridge University Press.[1] Now it has appeared, in seven fat volumes with a separate electronic version, overseen by three general editors including Donaldson—who provides a skillfully condensed version of his biography in Volume 1—with a team of distinguished editors for individual works, and it is a magnificent achievement. In recent years we have had notable editions of individual plays, but this is the first modern attempt to present the canon as a whole, including entertainments, masques, letters, and poems and prose writings as well. It replaces the hitherto standard multi-volume edition by C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson (hereafter H&S), published between 1925 and 1952, and overturns many of their conclusions. To mention only the most radical example, *A Tale of a Tub*, which H&S judged to be Jonson's first play, written in collaboration in the 1590s, is now assigned to him alone and dated to 1634, making it his *last* completed play. Jonson was a habitual reviser of his own work, and H&S consistently took the 1616 Folio as their copy-text, respecting his final thoughts; the Cambridge editors often follow the Quartos in their wish to present the plays as closely as possible in the form in which they were originally staged or published. The print edition presents the works chronologically, in modern spelling, with introductions and copious annotation. Its production values are impeccable, and it is a pleasure to handle and to read. The electronic edition adds an old-spelling text, transcripts of all the Jonson life-records, supplementary essays on textual and other matters, digital images of key manuscripts, editions of all the musical items, and a fully searchable database. Anything anyone wants to know about Jonson is now obtainable at the click of a mouse—with, of course, a subscription. The only serious criticism to be made of the project is that it is plainly aimed at academic institutions; its cost puts it beyond the reach of individual purchasers. I hope Cambridge will consider issuing the plays, at least, in single-volume editions at a more reasonable price.

Before looking in detail at some of the plays, I will mention other items briefly. About the letters it seems sufficient to note that they all exhibit Jonson's sense of the tone and style appropriate to the recipient and the occasion. It is no derogation of the editors to say that the masques are never going to achieve their full effect in a reading text alone, even one supplied, as these are, with a full description of the scenery and dances and a series of explanatory footnotes by the author. The money lavished on them was astonishing—budgets were normally around £2,000 for a one-off performance,

1 *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson, volumes 1-7*, edited by David Bevington, Martin Butler & Ian Donaldson; Cambridge University Press, 5224 pages, $1,089.99.

which equates to over $300,000 at today's prices. Jonson valued them as highly as his plays and was furious when the spectacle was praised, rather than the poetry; his increasingly acrimonious relationship with the stage designer Inigo Jones, whom he considered a mere mechanic, is well known. In the preface to *Hymenaei*, staged in 1606 for the marriage of Lady Frances Howard and the Earl of Essex, Jonson set out his theory of the masque, contrasting the evanescent sensuous appeal of the performance with the permanent value of the matrix of ideas underlying the text, "grounded upon antiquity and solid learning." To critics who objected that he was endowing trivia with too much importance, he retorted that those who could not digest the nutritious food he was offering could go home and eat a salad. *Hymenaei*, edited by David Lindley, is a fourfold hymn to Union: between the sexes in marriage, among the constituent parts of the social hierarchy, among the planets of the solar system, and between Scotland and England as embodied in the King of Great Britain, a title James first used in 1604. One of the goddesses is Juno, and much is made of the fact that her name, if spelt with I for J as was customary, is an anagram of "Unio." No fewer than sixteen noble men and women took part in the dancing. Yet the poetry cannot have its full effect without the music, the movement, the special effects, and the monarch as the cynosure of all eyes.

The poems present a textual situation of daunting complexity, to which Colin Burrow proves more than equal. They exist in over six hundred manuscripts, a fact of which H&S were unaware. Burrow vigorously defends the neglected translation of Horace's *Ars Poetica*, in which Jonson "is trying to make Horace *speak*" using a diction marked by "density, sharpness and obliquity." Translating from an inflected language to an uninflected one is no easy task. He is particularly probing about *The Forest*, noting its kinship with the *Silvae* of Statius, the disturbing woods through which Aeneas travels in *Aeneid* VI, and the opening of Dante's *Inferno* in the *selva oscura*. This earthly world is seen, in Poem IV, as "a shop/ Of toys and trifles, traps and snares," and "These poems suggest," Burrow says, "that the further you go into a wood the darker its landscape becomes." Jonson's close connection to the Sidney family is prominent in this collection (see "To Penshurst" among others), and they figure as an example of the need to transmit a heritage of valor, piety, and moral rectitude. Sadly, *The Forest* became a memorial to the family after the line died out. The posthumously published collection, *The Underwood* (1641), is often undervalued as a mere miscellany. Burrow finds more coherence in it and sees poignancy in the gap between the dates of composition and publication of many of the items: what we have in effect is an elegy for the Elizabethan age, all the more touching because the author himself is dead. "*The Underwood* did more than any other single volume to generate a cult of resistant nostalgia, in which dead poets praised a world which, from the darkening political perspective of the 1640s, appeared to be halcyon days before the emergence of discord in the church and war in the state." Jonson depicts himself as physically aging but intellectually vigorous; this is not the book of a man in decline. He is still courting patronage, still critical of trends in government policy such as the possibility of entering the Thirty Years' War, and still able to turn a beautiful lyric that looks forward to Cavalier poetry.

The editions of the prose works contribute in a major way to the success of the enterprise. Jonson's *English Grammar* is admittedly derivative, and not always accurate, but the record of his conversations in 1618–9 with William Drummond of Hawthornden, here called *Informations*, and his commonplace book *Discoveries*, another posthumously published text, are of absorbing interest. Ian Donaldson, who edits *Informations*, rightly advises us to read it as brilliant table-talk; Drummond was recording impromptu remarks, thrown off in the context of arguments that we cannot now fully reconstruct, doubtless a little fuelled by drink; Jonson was being self-consciously naughty at times, teasing, provocative, as Drummond implies in his concluding pen-portrait of his visitor ("given rather to lose a friend than a jest"). Lorna

Hutson's account of *Discoveries* is outstanding. She confronts us immediately with the paradox that in these entries Jonson is voicing his sentiments using the words of others, which he adapts, translates, even sometimes transcribes. The book puts into practice the view of *imitatio* propounded by Erasmus in *De copia* and *Adagia*: it is a "drama of allusion" to other authors, classical and contemporary. Nearly all its best-known lines, such as "Language most shows a man: speak, that I may see thee," turn out to be ultimately by someone else (Erasmus in this case, retailing an anecdote about Socrates). The apparent element of autobiography, of personal record, is deceptive; how far can this be called Jonson's own work? As the extent of his borrowings became clear in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some critics accused him of plagiarism. Hutson has a fine answer: what Jonson selects, what he rejects, and how he reworks what he keeps show his powers of critical judgment. It is his mind which has ordered these materials, and his style which gives them voice—a plain style, the opposite of Rabelais or Montaigne, paring down rather than piling up. The literary critical parts of the book are well known, but there is also much concern with politics, with the need for a healthy relationship between the monarch and an informed cultural elite: "Learning needs rest: sovereignty gives it. Sovereignty needs counsel: learning affords it." Speech is "the instrument of society," public schools "the seminaries of state," offering a better education than private tuition, because the pupil profits from correction, emulation, and competition within a community of scholars. Jonson doubtless has in mind his own time at Westminster School under its great teacher, later headmaster, Camden.

Jonson's major plays have never lacked admirers and they are all well served here, but the late plays, long dismissed, receive equally winning advocacy (not that that makes them, for me, any more readable or enjoyable). A signal achievement of the editors' critical introductions is their constant attention to the political context and topical resonances of the texts. Jonson, we're reminded, was more dependent on the court and on aristocratic patronage than Shakespeare, who won his independence as a shareholder in the Globe; thus Jonson had to be aware of the latest sartorial and intellectual fashions. In a masque, designed specifically as a complimentary performance, the panegyric note had to be to the fore; in a play, a finer balance might be struck between satirical critique and social tact. Jonson's moral didacticism, which ran throughout his career, was also informed by a highly developed sense of literary tradition, such as was required by the principles of *imitatio*. Anne Barton's influential case, in *Ben Jonson, Dramatist* (1984), that Jonson's Caroline plays display a "Shakespearean" nostalgia for Elizabethan England, needs modification, as Helen Ostrovich argues powerfully in her introduction to *The Magnetic Lady* (1632): "the large gap in Barton's theory is that she ascribes bardolatrously to Shakespeare what she should be ascribing to Jonson's interests from the beginning of his career." If to be "nostalgic" involves reminding his audience and readers of what he took to be permanent moral, ethical, and aesthetic values, then Jonson had never been anything else. He could be so scoffing about the modes of the hour precisely because he judged them by unchanging standards.

If one had to choose just one master-theme which would shed light on Jonson, the use and abuse of power would be a leading contender. His early miscalculation in having Queen Elizabeth impersonated onstage by a boy actor in *Every Man Out of His Humour* (1599) did not deter him, in *Cynthia's Revels* (1600), from treating what Eric Rasmussen and Matthew Steggle describe as "concerns about the unaccountability of monarchy and the relation between power and justice," a theme that carries over into *Poetaster* (1601) and *Sejanus* (1603) and receives its apogee in *Bartholomew Fair* (1614). The image of Elizabeth as an absolute monarch is, perhaps, too simple; her spymaster, Walsingham, kept much of his activity on her behalf to himself, and a monarch surrounded by flatterers and aspirants for promotion may well find it hard

to get at the truth. The fusion of adulatory myth and underhand deception in *Cynthia's Revels* seems close to the reality of Elizabethan court life. The character of Actaeon has often been taken to stand for the Earl of Essex, whose conspiracy may also be alluded to in *Poetaster*—a suggestion which, admittedly, is questioned by Gabriele Bernhard Jackson, just as the once-popular theory that *Catiline* (1611) is "about" the Gunpowder Plot is rejected by Inga-Stina Ewbank in her outstanding edition (the first since 1972, and the most fully annotated to date). As Jonson discovered when he openly mocked King James in *Eastward Ho!* (1605) and ended up in prison, it was foolish to be too specific; he insisted in *Poetaster* 3.5, a wholesale translation of Horace's *Satire* 1.3, that his method was to "spare men's persons, and but tax their crimes." This, one must add, is somewhat disingenuous, and Jackson duly notes the play's contribution to the ongoing quarrel between Jonson and his fellow playwrights Thomas Dekker and John Marston, but the vitality of *Poetaster* for us is elsewhere, in its insights into the role of patronage in a precarious literary milieu.

By contrast, imperial patronage in *Sejanus* controls more than the success or failure of a career. It may save or end a life. Tom Cain clearly shows how this play grows out of *Poetaster* in its emphasis on court toadying, envious factions, and public and private (self-imposed) censorship, but the satire has turned menacing. Jonson ascribed his arraignment before the Privy Council in 1605, when the play was printed, on charges of "treason and popery," to his having offended Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton. There was a case to answer, however; the printer of the 1605 edition, like Jonson at that time, was a Catholic, and Jonson had recently dined with him and Robert Catesby, one of the Gunpowder Plot conspirators. Cain believes that the play was largely written before Elizabeth's death, but its publication made it look unfortunately topical and threatening to James I. This was a feverish time; the apparently absurd obsession of Sir Politic Would-Be in *Volpone* (1606) with cloak-and-dagger espionage has an uncomfortable edge, since the first performance took place during the trial of the Gunpowder plotters. Venice, historically remarkable for its religious tolerance, becomes a mirror-image of Jacobean England in Jonson's mind. That very year he and his wife were charged with recusancy. There was no trial, but they were not exonerated until his return to Anglicanism in 1610. Richard Dutton reminds us that even the genre of *Volpone* has a political context, for although it is a unique beast-fable *play*, there was a long tradition of such *poems*, often aimed at powerful court figures—a recent example was Lord Burghley, a prime mover in anti-Catholic activities, who had been attacked in Spenser's *Prosopopoia, or Mother Hubbard's Tale* (1591).

The pursuit of power can be a two-edged sword. As Doll and Subtle discover when they are duped by Face in *The Alchemist* (1610), it can entail "the blurring of the line which divides tricking others from fooling yourself." (*The Alchemist* may well be the most difficult of Jonson's plays to annotate, but Peter Holland and William Sharman, just quoted, succeed triumphantly.) Wasp, in *Bartholomew Fair*, puts it differently: "He that will correct another must want [be free of] fault in himself." This play was the only one Jonson dedicated to King James, before whom it was performed in 1614; a rerun of the *Eastward Ho!* debacle was unthinkable. Yet several traits of James's character are mocked in the person of Justice Overdo, while the plight of Grace Wellborn, sold as a ward of court to the highest bidder so that she can be sold again as a bride to the richest suitor, reflects an actual practice much condemned at the time. John Creaser writes brilliantly about this "comedy against comedies" in which "the mockery is mocked, the parody is parodied." The Induction dismisses any expectation of a sentimentally festive play such as might come from an unnamed but unmistakeable writer of "*Tales*, *Tempests*, and such drolleries"; this is as much Vanity Fair as Bartholomew Fair, and the world it anatomizes conceals tawdriness and moral laxity beneath its seductively gaudy surface, but the exposure of vice by virtue is not as austere as in *Measure for Measure*, for here the self-appointed judges, Overdo and

Zeal-of-the-Land Busy, are themselves shown up as fools. The exchange between Lantern Leatherhead, the puppet-master (sometimes seen as a dig at Inigo Jones), and Busy, the hypocritical Puritan (a creation even better than his counterparts in *The Alchemist*), crystallizes issues of importance to Jonson's career as a whole:

> LANTERN: Sir, I present nothing but what is licensed by authority.
> BUSY: Thou art all licence, even licentiousness itself . . .

The Master of the Revels authorized plays for performance, much to the frustration of the Puritans, who saw such "licence" as permitting immorality. Jonson claims liberty here, not for irresponsible indulgence but for the exercise of right judgment, a skill which all the major characters in the Fair are shown to lack. James, who was in the first audience, is told in the Epilogue that he must decide whether the actors have used their liberty rightly: "This is your power to judge, great sir." Yet, Creaser observes, "rhetorically, Jonson is in command"; the play "fosters a sense of perspective and proportion so markedly lacking both in the characters and in the political hostilities of the day." Unaccountably, *Bartholomew Fair* seems only to have had two performances in Jonson's lifetime, on successive nights, Halloween and All Saints' Day (both apt for Jonson's interests here). Modern revivals, as Creaser says, tend to go for obvious laughs and fight shy of the more troubling aspects of this masterpiece.

The quality of Jonson's playwriting after *Bartholomew Fair* is disputed. His eye for topicality never dimmed: *The Devil Is an Ass* (1616) alludes to the widely unwelcome prospect of a marriage between Prince Charles and the Spanish Infanta; *The Staple of News* (1626) engages with debate about the rapid proliferation of broadsheet newsletters, which produced what we would call a mass media market, with its attendant ills; *The New Inn* (1629) incorporates currently fashionable Neoplatonic ideas about love; *The Magnetic Lady* (1632) satirizes the ritualistic churchmanship of William Laud, Bishop of London and later Archbishop of Canterbury; *A Tale of a Tub* (1633) repeats the anti-Laudianism and adds adverse reflections on local government, then unpopular for its compliance with the perpetual taxation demands of the monarch. The editors of all these plays, following the lead given by Anne Barton's book, sincerely believe in their literary merit, but, as I indicated in my earlier essay, I simply can't see it. *The Magnetic Lady* remained unperformed between 1632 and 1987, while *A Tale of a Tub* has not been performed at all since 1634 when, a contemporary reported, it was "not liked." As with other plays by Jonson, performance might reveal qualities not obvious on the page, but I doubt it. These plays seem labored, tired, and over-ingenious, lacking the sharp wit and warmth of feeling which animate even Jonson's harshest work. There is ill-advised recourse to familiar tricks; the puppet show in *A Tale of a Tub* is a poor thing compared to the one in *Bartholomew Fair*. Joseph Loewenstein may intend a compliment in comparing *The Staple of News* to Brecht; that depends on what you think of Brecht. Again, when Julie Sanders claims that *The New Inn* is "Jonson's closest approach to the Shakespearean romance model," the implied comparison can only be to Jonson's disadvantage. We have too little of the history-play *Mortimer His Fall* to be able to judge whether Jonson would have come close to Shakespeare's achievement in that genre; the soliloquy of Mortimer is at least interesting in a Marlovian way. It is with *The Sad Shepherd*, Jonson's last, incomplete play that an astonishing recovery occurs. All of a sudden we have writing like this:

> There in the stocks of trees white fays do dwell
> And span-long elves that dance about a pool,
> With each a little changeling in their arms.
> The airy spirits play with falling stars
> And mount the sphere of fire to kiss the moon . . .

Here there *is* a point in invoking Shakespeare—the Shakespeare of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Jonson had not often shown this exquisiteness

of verbal music in his dramatic verse. It is like Milton's sudden tapping into the Shakespearean seam in *Comus*. The editors, Anne Barton and Eugene Giddens, speculate that Jonson had also read, or re-read, Lyly's *Gallathea*, a comedy of the 1580s, which had just been reprinted. The Robin Hood setting, coupled with the machinations of a witch, Maudlin, and her servant Puck-Hairy, may seem at first a somewhat effete pastoral, but this view is quickly challenged as the shape-shifting of Maudlin imperils Robin and Marian's trust in one another, and more profoundly threatens the individual's control of his or her own identity. The sad shepherd of the title, Eglamour, is driven mad with grief for the supposed death of his sweetheart, who is actually Maudlin's prisoner. The merry men initially pity him as crazed, but they increasingly come to seem as deluded as he is. If we have met the themes of self-knowledge and right judgment before, the note of lyrical tenderness is new. Sadly, Jonson did not get beyond the middle of Act 3, but left a plot outline in which a happy ending was assured.

That such a project as the Cambridge Jonson can be brought to fruition at all, in the prevailing academic publishing climate, is a miracle. That it has been completed in only fifteen years, compared to the twenty-seven it took H&S, is an amazing feat. Jonson was not always fortunate in his collaborators, or well received by his audience, but he could not have had a better team than he has here, and our applause should be unstinting.

"Poetry & Truth"
by David Yezzi

In his "Dedication" to *Don Juan*, Byron strikes a characteristically spicy note. After ruminating for a couple of stanzas on Milton and comparing him, with irony, to the then Laureate, Robert Southey, whom Byron hated, he concludes an ottava rima with: "Would he [Milton] adore a sultan? he obey/ The intellectual eunuch Castlereagh?" Not quite content with that, Byron provides an alternate couplet, which employs an inferior rhyme but an even more pointed assault: "Would he subside into a hackney Laureate—/ A scribbling, self-sold, soul-hired, scorn'd Iscariot?" Byron adds:

> I doubt if "Laureate" and "Iscariot" be good rhymes, but must say, as Ben Jonson did to Sylvester, who challenged him to rhyme with—
>
> "I, John Sylvester,
> Lay with your sister."
>
> Jonson answered,—"I, Ben Jonson, lay with your wife." Sylvester answered,—"That is not rhyme."—"No," said Ben Jonson; "but it is *true*."

It takes a special kind of poet to maul a rhyme for the sake of the truth, and, of course, Byron here eats his cake and has it too. In general, one does not look to poems for factual truths, lest Keats's Cortez be permanently swapped for Balboa in the history books. But if poetry proves largely unsatisfactory to Plato and Detective Sergeant Joe "Just the facts, ma'am" Friday in terms of veracity, then what kind of truth is poetry after?

I'd like to offer a few thoughts about truth not from the point of view of the philosopher but from that of the poet (receiving thereby a significant demotion in Socrates' rankings in the *Phaedrus*, from first place to sixth out of nine. Poets follow such types as household managers, financiers, doctors, and prophets, and outstrip only manual laborers, sophists, and tyrants). The tension between poetry and truth gave Goethe the title of his autobiography, *Aus meinem Leben: Dichtung und Wahrheit* ("From My Life: Poetry and Truth"), written between 1811 and 1833. W. H. Auden borrowed Goethe's title in 1959 for a prose sequence on love, and, in 1977, the poet Anthony Hecht (a great admirer of both poets) took the same title for a poem in which he considers, among other things, Goethe, the Second World War, and the thorny relationship between truth and art. Hecht conveyed the truth of his war experience as a poet not as a journalist or historian.

That poetry greatly enriches our experience is not a hard case to make: the *Iliad*, the *Aeneid*, *Beowulf*, *The Divine Comedy*, Shakespeare's sonnets and plays, and *Paradise Lost*. It's impossible to imagine our lives—our language—without them. When we say, "His voice was stentorian," or "He is to the manner born," or "It was sheer pandemonium," we employ just a smattering of the countless words and idioms derived from these works, which are woven into the fabric of our daily talk. And, of course, these works routinely

speak to one another, like cousins sharing news of distant relations at a holiday dinner. One work allusively gossips about another work, a practice to which T. S. Eliot—with his footnote-bedizened *Waste Land* and its references to Dante, Shakespeare, Kyd, Nerval, Baudelaire, the Upanishads, etc.—was rather a latecomer.

So keen is Shakespeare on the story of Dido, the Queen of Carthage, for example, that he mentions her four times in *The Tempest*, twice in *Titus Andronicus*, and once each in *The Merchant of Venice*, *2 Henry VI*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Hamlet*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. Now it is likely that Shakespeare borrowed these references to the "widow Dido" in *The Tempest* not from the *Aeneid* but from Montaigne's essay "Of Diverting and Diversions," in John Florio's translation of 1603, but this is just a further example of how such references are cross-pollinated and propagated.

In fact, as Eliot knew, allusion itself is a great propagator of culture. The story of Dido for Shakespeare is a liquid bit of cultural currency, known to all, a story that plays equally well in the upper stalls and down among the oyster shells. Hamlet himself enacts a similar bit of cultural recuperation, recalling for the players Aeneas's tale to Dido: "The rugged Pyrrhus, he whose sable arms,/ Black as his purpose, did the night resemble/ When he lay couchèd in the ominous horse . . ." From Timaeus to Virgil to Montaigne to Shakespeare: as stories and references find their way through successive generations of writers, they are revised and revitalized. Allusion is one of the ways that poems *mean*.

We love these great poems for the stories they tell and for the history they contain. They give important information about who we are as a people, the roots of our customs, our words, our values, and our beliefs. They are roadmaps of our humanity. James Joyce once said about his novel *Ulysses*, to Frank Budgen, as they were walking together along the Universitätstrasse in Zurich in 1918: "I want to give a picture of Dublin so complete that if the city one day suddenly disappeared from the earth it could be reconstructed out of my book." And indeed the novel follows the Blooms and Dedalus from street to street, and from beach to bar to bedroom. But clearly this kind of information is not all that is being communicated by a work of fiction or poetry. Indeed, it could be argued that this sort of knowledge—the kind regularly imparted by a newspaper column or a search engine—is almost incidental to the real work of the poem, whose ultimate object is the education of the emotions.

The poet Mark Strand, who died this past November, once told Wallace Shawn in a *Paris Review* interview that "You don't read poetry for the kind of truth that passes for truth in the workaday world. You don't read a poem to find out how you get to Twenty-fourth Street." In other words, poetic truth does not inhere ultimately in the denotative language of the poem. For facts, we have much more effective means of communication: the instruction manual, the brochure, the travel guide, or the public lecture. When Goethe takes "Poetry and Truth" as the title of his autobiography, what he is suggesting in part, I think, is that experience, in a work of art, may be rendered most clearly, and in a sense most truthfully, by attending to something beyond the verifiable facts. Fine, you might say, but doesn't art, then, become, as Jacques Maritain wrote, "a world apart, closed, limited, absolute"—not the apprehension of reality but a replacement for reality, an illusion? This was a mote to trouble the mind's eye of Plato.

A definition of poetry put forward by the poet Yvor Winters in his book *Primitivism and Decadence* (1937) sheds light on the question. A poem, Winters wrote, is a statement in words about a human experience—so far, so good, no?—a statement, he was quick to add, that pays *particular attention* to the connotative or emotional charge of language. Now, we all know where to find the denotative meaning of a word: we go to the dictionary. The connotative shades of a word, however, are harder to locate precisely. Take, for example, the word *prison*. The *OED* reports: "Originally: the condition of being kept in captivity or confinement; forcible deprivation of personal liberty;

imprisonment. Hence (now the usual sense): a place of incarceration." Clear, certainly, but a little dry. One could not say that this definition contains the complete meaning of the word.

Connotation communicates the emotions associated with a human experience. When we attend to the connotative or associative charge of *prison*, we think of, say, Edgar Allan Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum": "A suffocating odour pervaded the prison! . . . I panted! I gasped for breath!" Or of Richard II in Pomfret Castle, only moments before his death: "I have been studying how I may compare/ This prison where I live unto the world. . . ." Or take Dante's Ugolino, who, after his children have succumbed one by one to starvation in their shared prison, gives into his unspeakable hunger: "Then fasting," he confesses, "had more power than grief." Isolation, deprivation, dankness, threat. Connotation comprises all of the associations—visual, emotional, sonic—that have accrued to a word in all of its uses. The job of the poet is to manage or marshal these emotional charges of language as aptly as possible with regard to a specific experience.

For Winters, poetry—and, in its concision, lyric poetry, especially—is the highest linguistic form because, taken together, connotation and denotation compose the "total content" of language. It's true that the two exist together in other kinds of writing, a novel, say, but poetry, by dint of its meters, lines, and highly wrought rhythms, modulates feeling with the greatest control. Connotation in poetry, then, acquires what Winters thinks of as a "moral" dimension. In order to render human experience truthfully, connotation or "feeling" must be precisely managed:

> The artistic process is one of moral evaluation of human experience, by means of a technique which renders possible an evaluation more precise than any other. The poet tries to understand his experience in rational terms, to state his understanding, and simultaneously to state, by means of the feelings we attach to words, the kind and degree of emotion that should properly be motivated by this understanding.

The term "moral," then, refers—at least in this instance—to a fairly technical process of selecting the best words in the best order for a given subject. "In so far as the rational statement is understandable and acceptable, and in so far as the feeling is properly motivated by the rational statement, the poem will be good," he tells us.

Winters's detractors—who feel that he, in his adherence to reason, quashes emotion in poetry—miss the point, I think. For Winters, emotion, expressed in the proper degree, is the whole ballgame. But this question of degree is crucial; if the feeling in a poem is either overstated or understated, the poem falls down. Excessive emotion, a form of sentimentality, obscures the experience under consideration, while the opposite of sentimentality—a kind of cold reportage—can also be a failure of evaluation. Understatement of the emotion robs experience of its humanity. The statement "Three prisoners were publicly executed in a detention center" crisply relates the facts, but in "The Shield of Achilles" Auden affords the reader some inkling of the feelings involved:

> Barbed wire enclosed an arbitrary spot
> Where bored officials lounged (one
> cracked a joke)
> And sentries sweated for the day was hot:
> A crowd of ordinary decent folk
> Watched from without and neither
> moved nor spoke
> As three pale figures were led forth and bound
> To three posts driven upright in the ground.
>
> The mass and majesty of this world, all
> That carries weight and always weighs
> the same
> Lay in the hands of others; they were small
> And could not hope for help and no
> help came:
> What their foes liked to do was done, their
> shame
> Was all the worst could wish; they lost their pride
> And died as men before their bodies died.

We would not expect this sort of account from Anderson Cooper, but we should not accept

anything less from our poets. As William Carlos Williams wrote famously, if somewhat blowzily, in "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower":

> It is difficult
> to get the news from poems
> yet men die miserably every day
> for lack
> of what is found there.

But what, exactly, is found there? And could one possibly die from the lack of it?

One thing found there is song. From ancient times, poetry and music were a single expression. The Greek word *mousike* denotes a combined expression of words, music, and dance. The critic H. T. Kirby-Smith tells us that, in the Greek rites, "Dance movements were coordinated with the audible part of the performance by the lifting and clumping down of an enlarged shoe worn by a leader, or by the raising and lowering of a staff." Poetry and song—or incantation, or chant—often worked together as the basis of religious worship in ancient languages such as Sanskrit, Hebrew, Egyptian, and Greek.

Poetry without music is a relatively recent development. A pronounced separation came around 1550, before which, Kirby-Smith notes, "the concept of a unified performance combining melody, words, and dance had never completely faded out." The songlike cadence of poetry, in fact all of prosody, is in itself semantic and carries an emotional charge. Every syllable, every *phoneme*, is highly ordered in such a way as to communicate feeling.

It was this irrational, associative aspect of song that got the rhapsode Ion in trouble with Socrates. A rhapsode was a "stitcher-together of songs," but his songs were not his own creation. They were the work of the poet, whose lines were divinely inspired:

> For all good poets compose their beautiful poems [Socrates says] not by art but by inspiration and in a state of possession; and good composers of songs are not in their senses when they write their beautiful songs, but are just like Corybantes who are not in their senses when they dance. . . . For a poet is a light and winged and holy creature, and can not make poetry until he is inspired and is out of his senses and his reason is no longer in him; and until this comes to pass, no man can make poems or give forth oracles. For it is not by art that they make their many beautiful poems and speeches about things, . . . but by a divine dispensation each man can make a beautiful poem only about the single matter to which the Muse inspires him; . . . about all else he is incapable.

Did Plato, then, really intend to exclude most poets from his polity? It would seem so:

> We can admit no poetry in our state save hymns to the gods and praises of famous men; for if the Muse of pleasure is admitted, in epic or in lyric verse, the place of law and of universally accepted reason will be usurped by pleasure and pain. In short, there has always been a quarrel between philosophy and poetry; so that the former judgment of exile passed against poetry is justified by the nature of poetry.

And yet Plato could possibly put up with poets, if they could somehow manage to pull their own weight, if poetry could prove "not only pleasant but useful." Unfortunately, he says, poets may know how to make poems but otherwise they are "imitators of phantoms of virtue and of the other subjects of their making." Homer may not be admitted as the great educator of mankind because his moral authority is in question.

The relation of truth to poetry remains fraught to this day. What truths can poetry tell us and what could its real-world use possibly be? W. H. Auden wrote that "poetry makes nothing happen." He understood that no poem had saved a single Jew from death at the hands of the Nazis. Still, he believed in the necessity of action. "Poetry is not concerned with telling people what to do," he writes, "but with extending our knowledge of good and evil, perhaps making the necessity for action more urgent and its nature more clear, but only leading us to the point where it is possible for us to make a rational moral choice."

In this respect, the poet Anthony Hecht possessed one of the most compelling moral visions in late-twentieth-century American poetry. In "Dichtung und Wahrheit," he juxtaposes a marble statue and a photo from World War II:

> The Discus Thrower's marble heave,
> Captured in mid-career,
> That polished poise, that Parian arm
> Sleeved only in the air,
> Vesalian musculature, white
> As the mid-winter moon—
> This, and the clumsy snapshot of
> An infantry platoon,
> Those grubby and indifferent men,
> Lounging in bivouac,
> Their rifles aimless in their laps,
> Stop history in its tracks.

Seen from the distance of years, that photo—an actual photo of Hecht's company—becomes drained of meaning, the expression inscrutable and impossible to read. What must he have been thinking all those years before?

> It needs a Faust to animate
> The wan homunculus,
> Construe the stark, unchanging text,
> Winkle the likes of us
> Out of a bleak geology
> That art has put to rest,
> And by a sacred discipline
> Give breath back to the past.
> How, for example, shall I read
> The expression on my face
> Among that company of men
> In that unlikely place?

If the documentary evidence, the photograph, does not contain the whole truth of experience, where, then, does the truth lie? The poem ends with this question in mind:

> We begin with the supreme donnée, the world,
> Upon which every text is commentary,
> And yet they play each other, the oak leaf cured
> In sodden ditches of autumn darkly confirms
> Our words; and by the frailest trifles
> (A doubt, a whisper, and a handkerchief)
> Venetian pearl and onyx are cast away.
> It is, in the end, the solitary scholar
> Who returns us to the freshness of the text,
> Which returns to us the freshness of the world
> In which we find ourselves, like replicas,
> Dazzled by glittering dawns, upon a stage.
> Pentelic balconies give on the east;
> The clouds are scrolled, bellied in apricot,
> Adrift in pools of Scandinavian blue.
> Light crisps the terraces of dolomite.
> Enter The Prologue, who at once declares,
> "We begin with the supreme donnée, the word."

Hecht's supreme donnée gets transformed in the poem from the *world* to the *word*, until art is as real or more real than the experience, a sentiment that recalls Nietzsche's famous line from *The Birth of Tragedy*: "it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified."

Elsewhere in the poem, Hecht suggests that it's "More difficult to know how the spirit learns/ Its scales, or the exact dimensions of fear," an acknowledgment of the challenge posed by the education of the emotions through language. This challenge creates the underlying tension in Hecht's most famous poem of the Holocaust, which takes its title from Goethe's dying words, "More Light! More Light!":

> We move now to outside a German wood.
> Three men are there commanded to dig a hole
> In which the two Jews are ordered to lie down
> And be buried alive by the third, who is a Pole.
>
> Not light from the shrine at Weimar beyond the hill
> Nor light from heaven appeared. But he did refuse.
> A Lüger settled back deeply in its glove.
> He was ordered to change places with the Jews.
>
> Much casual death had drained away their souls.
> The thick dirt mounted toward the quivering chin.
> When only the head was exposed the order came
> To dig him out again and to get back in.
>
> No light, no light in the blue Polish eye.
> When he finished a riding boot packed down the earth.

> The Luger hovered lightly in its glove.
> He was shot in the belly and in three hours bled
> to death.
>
> No prayers or incense rose up in those hours
> Which grew to be years, and every day came mute
> Ghosts from the ovens, sifting through crisp air,
> And settled upon his eyes in a black soot.

Hecht did not witness this scene at Buchenwald—it was not true for him in this sense—but takes it from a book by the historian and survivor Eugen Kogon. Even so, the scene resonates very directly with his own life. Hecht's infantry company was present at the liberation of Flossenbürg at end of the war. As he later explained in an interview, Flossenbürg

> was both an extermination camp and a slave-labor camp, where prisoners were made to manufacture Messerschmitts at a factory right within the perimeter of the camp. When we arrived, the SS personnel had, of course, fled. Prisoners were dying at a rate of 500 a day from typhus. Since I had the rudiments of French and German, I was appointed to interview such French prisoners as were well enough to speak, in the hope of securing evidence against those who ran the camp. Later, when some of these were captured, I presented them with the charges leveled against them, translating their denials or defenses back into French for the sake of their accusers, in an attempt to get to the bottom of what was done and who was responsible. The place, the suffering, the prisoners' accounts were beyond comprehension. For years after I would wake shrieking.

How Hecht managed to preserve his sanity, how he managed to express his anguish to his family, and how he began, after the war, the fraught process of recovery had, incredibly, a great deal to do with his love of Shakespeare. As Hecht later told an audience at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington:

> I had to leave college mid-career to join the army, and one of the few talismans I brought with me from civilian life to protect my spirit and sanity from the mindlessness of military training and overseas combat was a little paperback volume of Shakespeare plays.

In his letters home, Hecht put on a stoic, even jocular, aspect, despite severe and chronic depression. On one occasion, he dashed off a quick postcard to his family with a few lines remembered from *As You Like It*: "Sweet are the uses of adversity;/ Which, like the toad, ugly + venomous,/ Wears yet a precious jewel in his head[.] There is a marked paucity of jewels in my toad—but I continue to search." When in October 1944 Hecht was overcome by a "fit of abysmal despair," he wrote to his own mother, Dorothea, the words Hamlet speaks to Gertrude: "I have that within me which passeth show/ These but the trappings + the suits of woe."

At the end of the war, reading Shakespeare helped bring the traumatized Hecht back to himself:

> I emerged from the war sound, and, if not sane, at least not stark raving mad, to no one's astonishment more than my own. And the best index I think I had of the recovery of my balance, my humanity [remember the line "Much casual death had drained away their souls"], and my most valuable faculties, was the gradual recovery of the pleasure of reading Shakespeare. That pleasure has continued and grown richer ever since. I like to believe it has had a subtle and strengthening influence on my own poetry.

Hecht's poetry about the war is filled with echoes of Shakespeare, including the poems in his Pulitzer Prize-winning collection, *The Hard Hours*, which includes "More Light! More Light!" *King Lear*, in particular, recurs throughout the collection. In April of 1978, Hecht wrote to the critic Ashley Brown that

> [T]he tragic vision of *Lear* is actually present in *The Hard Hours*, in the final part of "Rites and Ceremonies." The lines, in quotation marks,
>
> "None does offend,
> None, I say,
> None"?
>
> is Lear . . .

Lear, he tells Brown, also lurks in the interstices of other poems, such as "Behold the Lilies of the Field," "Birdwatchers of America," and "perhaps elsewhere." One could add poems such as "Third Avenue in Sunlight," and, importantly, "'More Light! More Light!'"

King Lear is perhaps the most complete statement of negation that we have in English. Just run though some of the lines in your head: "Nothing will come of Nothing"; "Never. Never. Never. Never. Never"; "They could not, would not do 't"; "No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison"; and "No, no; no life?" Like so much of *Lear*, Hecht's poem proceeds through negatives. The first *no* occurs early in the poem, placed in the mouth of an Elizabethan martyr, who has "made no crime." Then, accompanying the first "nor," comes another echo from *Lear*: the word *howl* repeats Lear's howl at the death of Cordelia. The second scene in the poem, quoted above, constitutes a tightly woven pattern of negatives. Goethe's emphatic dying words become:

> Not light from the shrine at Weimar beyond
> the hill
> Nor light from heaven appeared.

And, then, two stanzas later:

> No light, no light in the blue Polish eye.

The final image, again with an echo of *Lear*, is of sightless eyes:

> and every day came mute
> Ghosts from the ovens, sifting through crisp air,
> And settled upon his eyes in a black soot.

The survivors of the camps, as Hecht himself witnessed, were naked, skeletal, their yellowed skin stretched over bony frames. As one soldier from C Company reported: "Many had died with their eyes wide open staring into space as if they were seeing over and over again all the torture the Germans had put them through—their mouths open, gasping for that last breath that might keep them alive." When a prisoner died, one of his fellows would carry his body to the stack of bodies beside the incinerator. The smell, he added, was unimaginable.

Raised in a largely secular household, Hecht's experience of Judaism—a source of childhood shame in a climate of genteel anti-Semitism—changed significantly after the war: "In time I came to feel an awed reverence for what the Jews of Europe had undergone, a sense of marvel at the hideousness of what they had been forced to endure. I came to feel that it was important to be worthy of their sacrifices, to justify my survival in the face of their misery and extinction, and slowly I began to shed my shame at being Jewish."

As the poem reminds us through allusion, the scene takes place in the land of Goethe, the great man of Europe, an epitome of German culture, whose house became, after his death, a shrine for the hoards of his admirers. It was also the land of Hecht's own great-grandparents. If the poem has a "use" in the sense that Plato intends, then perhaps it is that those "mute ghosts from the ovens" are not entirely silenced. Through Hecht's poem, they instruct our emotions. To adopt Auden's formulation, they extend our knowledge of good and evil, clarifying the nature of action, and leading us to a point where we can make a moral choice.

"Our duty to praise"
by Bill Coyle

Reviewing P. J. Kavanagh's *New Selected Poems* in *The Spectator* last year, Wynn Wheldon began by lamenting that "P. J. Kavanagh, if not dismissed or relegated, is often shall we say bracketed, as a 'nature poet.'"[1] Now, regular readers of *The Spectator* probably knew who P. J. Kavanagh was, as he had often reviewed books for the magazine and had a column there for more than ten years before moving on to the *TLS*. The broader British reading public might have known the name, too. In addition to his poetry and journalism, Kavanagh has written travel books, children's books, novels, and television scripts. He's also acted in television and films: satirical sketches in the 1960s, a few episodes of the show *Father Ted*, most prominently (from an American perspective) in *Half Moon Street* (1986) with Michael Caine and Sigourney Weaver.

Even in the UK, though, many of those readers who started the review in *The Spectator* may have done so believing it would be about the better-known Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh (1904–1967), of *The Great Hunger* fame, a confusion that's dogged P(atrick) J(oseph) Kavanagh throughout his career. In the United States, meanwhile, the younger, English Kavanagh is almost entirely unknown: of the first fifty hits on Google, there's only one reference to our man from an American source, an issue of *The New Yorker* from 1971. On these shores—again, to judge from Google—he's more likely to be confused with a certain lacrosse coach at Mount Union University in Ohio.

That's a shame, because P. J. Kavanagh is one of the best poets writing in English today. Here is "They Lift Their Heads":

> At the back of the hall of the head the permanent question:
> Do the now become lovely, the unimpeded,
> If they exist at all, still help us?
> Avert if they can, with angelic palm, the car crash?
> Prevent, with palm reversed, on the dangerous kerb?
> Or even, like mothers chatting outside a playground,
> Impossibly adult, more concerned with each other,
> Are patting our heads with invisible unfelt palms
> And, over our heads, call our skirt cling, "just a stage!"
>
> When patient beasts lift up their heads from feeding,
> We see in alerted eyes their identical question,
> "Will he help me?" We recognize that expression
> With greater fellow feeling than we know
> And try to pat their heads. They flinch away,
> Are left to endure the grip of night alone
> (For who in his senses goes to join the sheep?);
> We see them in the morning, frost-caked,
> Night-stunned, with no choice. They lift their heads.

Kavanagh's favorite themes—the relationship between the living and the dead, and between

1 *New Selected Poems*, by P. J. Kavanagh, foreword by Derek Mahon. Carcanet Press, 166 pages, $21.95.

humans and the rest of nature—are center stage here. Many of his devices, too: the line that, while recognizably metrical (in this case iambic pentameter) can expand or contract as need be; the unforced allusions (for instance: *playground* and *just a stage* to *All the world's a stage/ And all the men and women merely players*); the way everyday language opens up unexpected depths, or heights, as when the threefold repetition of "palms" gestures towards the foliage of Paradise, and towards the entry into Jerusalem. For who "goes to join the sheep" indeed, if not the Good Shepherd? "In his senses," that is, "in his right mind." Was Christ crazy to "join the sheep"? There's scriptural warrant for suggesting that his Incarnation and sacrificial death were madness by the standards of the world he came to save. But the word "senses" means also sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell, the means by which we know the physical world. Again, the Incarnation.

What's most immediately winning about the poem, though, is its awareness of its own potential absurdity. The speaker's expression of self-consciousness about hopes of an afterlife—"*if* they exist at all"; "or *even*, like mothers"—is the very thing that frees him to voice those hopes, and in the homeliest metaphors imaginable. As befits someone who's acted and written scripts (and whose father wrote for radio and films), Kavanagh is refreshingly frank about the difference an awareness of audience makes. In a BBC Radio 3 interview, he talked about the reader's likely response to religious sentiment—he is a Catholic poet in an increasingly post-Christian country—but the point about poetic method applies more broadly:

> I do feel very strongly that it is part of our duty to *praise*, and there is a technical difficulty there, because if you praise outside a specifically religious context—and we don't have a specifically religious context, in literature anyway—you run the risk of the reader saying: "Well, it's all right for some!" So you have to include—and it's quite easy to do so—you have to signal your own knowledge that it is not all right for some, nor perhaps is it even all right for yourself.[2]

2 *Poets Talking: Poet of the Month Interviews from BBC Radio 3*, by Clive Wilmer; Carcanet Press, 160 pages, £11.65.

The most egregious example from Kavanagh's own life of all not being right was the death of his first wife, Sally, of polio at the age of twenty-four, the event that concludes his memoir *The Perfect Stranger*. Rather than simply devastating the poet, Sally's death transformed her into—or revealed her more fully as—a Beatrice-like figure who leads the poet into a deeper contemplation of the natural and human worlds, and via these of the supernatural and divine. Thinking of Dante, I often feel a twinge of pity for his wife, who occasioned no poems as far as we know. By contrast, Kavanagh's second wife, Kate, with whom he has two sons, has inspired some of her husband's best work. Here he observes her,

> a kneeling figure
> Cleaning the nose of a dying rabbit,
> Feeding it with your fingers, day after day—
> The children's Flopsie. (Seen from the corner
> of the eye
> A tolerated creature becomes an enlarging habit,
> A separation, a world, determined; its white
> Glowed on the grass at night, a spectral light,
> A dumpish dignity.) We took it to be anesthetized
> to death,
> unsaveable. I would have left it with the vet.
> You held it, smiling. In your hands its breath
> gentled, its rasping rhythm slowed and—
> "Flopsie flopped"
> I might have wished to say, but no—
> Into the white element she seemed to go,
> Soundlessly to melt, like snow in snow,
> Dignified, determined. This I saw because of you,
> Among horse-douches, rabies posters. Her
> breathing stopped,
> You said (to the rabbit) "There," removed your
> hand,
> Still smiling . . .
> ("For C. E. K.")

There are wonderful effects here, surprisingly subtle, some of them, for a poem with rhyme words like *rabbit* and *flopped*, both of which set the reader up for slapstick before delivering their own "dumpish dignity." There's the way that, as the poet observes his wife's care for the rabbit, and just at the instant of the animal's death, "it" becomes "she"; the way that

his wife says, not "there, there," but simply, "there," less comfort, the rabbit being beyond the need for comfort, than a recognition of arrival at a destination; the way sentimentality is kept at bay by the "Flopsie flopped" crack the poet doesn't—yet is tempted to, and in a sense does—allow himself to make, one that might issue from the "drill sergeant who considers all poetry rubbish," that Auden thought all poets should include in their internal Censorates. An essay could be written on Kavanagh's use of parentheses, but here I'll confine myself to noting the way these hold the phrase "to the rabbit" like two hands.

"Late Acknowledgement," from the volume *Presences*, is written in memory of, and characteristically addressed *to*, the children's author Elizabeth Pritchard. The childlike, songlike repetition of Pritchard's name in the first line establishes the anapestic rhythm of the poem, while its threefold repetition summons the poem's subject. Hers becomes a name to conjure with:

> Elizabeth Pritchard, Elizabeth Pritchard, Liz,
> We never know whom we shall miss.
> Some dead leave a gap that heals over, others
> leave presences.

One of Kavanagh's favorite writers is John Cowper Powys, and on several occasions he has written approvingly of how, in summer, the novelist would rescue fish and tadpoles from pools that were in danger of drying up, carrying them to deeper pools. In "Late Acknowledgment," he expresses a similar admiration of Pritchard's small works of mercy:

> Last summer I teased when you filled every
> corner
> With jugs of wild grasses
> And froze to a statue under our tentative
> swallows.
> But later when scything the grasses
> It was your everywhere reverent vases
> I saw, not the rankness I cut . . .
>
> Even the pebbles you put to guard willow-herb
> seedlings
> I find that I nod to, whether I want them or not,
> As though the degree of your care for the small
> and abandoned
> And tentative lingers, a seedling you planted.

How much Kavanagh gets out of a phrase like "nod to." It's an acknowledgment, for one thing, and of the kind two guards might exchange (Pritchard has put the guards in the garden). And while a nodding acquaintance is not much, by implicitly characterizing his own knowledge of the pebbles as superficial, the poet reminds himself, and the reader, that Pritchard's knowledge went deeper.

The poem's ending is a wonderful feat, done literally with mirrors—or with *a* mirror, albeit an imagined one:

> You, who called yourself dotty, a typical dotty
> lone woman,
> Unlucky in love, and I half-agreed, and agree;
> Though Elizabeth Pritchard,
> Still puzzled and not understanding
> Enough, when I think how I'd like to
> Swing you up high to the mirror,
> As grown-ups with children, a hand under
> each elbow,
> To show you, triumphant, too late now,
> The presence you are,
> It is you that holds me.

In one of the earliest poems Kavanagh addressed to his wife Sally following her death, he said, concerning her death, "I don't speak of the thing itself, not that/ But of how I seem to see our lives in the light of it." *In the light of it* is characteristically, apparently off-handedly, brilliant. In *Real Presences* George Steiner noted that, "it is the enterprise and privilege of the aesthetic to quicken into lit presence the continuum between temporality and eternity, between matter and spirit, between man and the other." In his charming, disarming way, P. J. Kavanagh is engaged in this enterprise as seriously and successfully as anyone writing today. If the modesty of his manner has led some to underestimate this poet's ambition and accomplishment, it's about time that changed.

Langston Hughes's two faces
by Michael Anderson

Reflecting on his career, the vaudeville comedian Bert Williams attributed his success to his decision to perform in blackface. "A great protection," he said, that "gave me a great place to hide." A generation later, Langston Hughes became Williams's literary equivalent: a black artist who found his voice in the appropriation of the black underclass. So successful was he that a half-century after his death, Hughes remains what he energetically endeavored to become: the beloved bard of black America. Like his poetic idol Walt Whitman, Hughes strove to be (in Alfred Kazin's characterization of the Good Gray Poet) "the poet of the people and to act the poet in public."

Incubated in the Harlem Renaissance, Hughes initially appeared to fit its self-conscious strategy of winning white approval through cultural display, "civil rights by copyright," in the phrase of the phenomenon's foremost historian, David Levering Lewis. At the age of nineteen, Hughes became one of the early supernovae of the Renaissance with the publication in 1922 of "The Negro Speaks of Rivers":

> I've known rivers:
> I've known rivers ancient as the world and older
> than the flow of human blood in human veins.
>
> My soul has grown deep like the rivers.
>
> I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were
> young.
> I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me
> to sleep.
> I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids
> above it.
> I heard the singing of the Mississippi when
> Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and
> I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in
> the sunset.
>
> I've known rivers:
> Ancient, dusky rivers.
>
> My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

Such sonorous solemnity, however befitting the constrictive gentilities of the black intelligentsia, Hughes was abandoning when his first collection was published three years later, a transition signaled in the book's very title, *The Weary Blues*. "To me it seems that Langston will be doing a bad thing in adopting such a title," fumed Countee Cullen, the other poetic prodigy of the Harlem Renaissance. "That is just the title to suit . . . white people who want us to do only Negro things, and those not necessarily of the finest type."

The two men epitomized the intraracial tensions besetting the cultural politics of the Renaissance. They were as opposed in poetic practice as they were in subject matters. Unlike the punctiliously formalist Cullen—"a rank conservative, loving the measured line and the skillful rhyme," he described himself—Hughes best expressed himself in free verse. "As a poet Hughes believed in the power of inspiration and improvisation," Arnold Rampersad writes in his superb definitive two-volume biogra-

phy of Hughes; "Cullen practiced sonnets and villanelles, honed his rhymes, and searched mightily for the exact word." Cullen devoted himself to what he considered universal themes; Hughes sought to celebrate the street life of Harlem. Cullen was hailed as the poet laureate of the Renaissance; Hughes delighted to be called the "poet low-rate" by the black press following his second collection in 1927, *Fine Clothes to the Jew*. The title, taken from the poem "Hard Times," describing the Harlem poor making ends meet by pawning their clothes, again indicates his poetic intentions—verse that sang the blues, both in form:

> De railroad bridge's
> A sad song in de air.
> De railroad bridge's
> A sad song in de air.
> Ever time de trains pass
> I wants to go somewhere

and in spirit:

> Put on yo' red silk stockings,
> Black gal.
> Go out an' let de white boys
> Look at yo' legs.

Many contemporary reviewers compared *Fine Clothes to the Jew* to *Lyrical Ballads*: both attempted to elevate common lives and common speech to the level of poetry. However, the respectable black press called Hughes's poems "unsanitary, insipid and repulsing." Hughes argued that blues and spirituals were equally the "two great Negro gifts to American music" and both forms of folk song. But unlike the rural spirituals, the blues were "*city* songs rising from the crowded streets of big towns." In that he put his finger on the reason for bourgeois black disdain. For all the lip service Renaissance mandarins paid in praise to "the folk"—think of W. E. B. Du Bois's glorification of the "sorrow songs" in *The Souls of Black Folk*—the importation of a half-million black Southerners to the North during the Great Migration was perceived by established Northern blacks as a threat to their social status, a problem in need of "uplift."

Hughes's rebellious rhapsodizing came close to class treachery. By birth he belonged to what Du Bois famously extolled as "the Talented Tenth," the minuscule portion of Afro-America he expected to lead, and represent, the race. Hughes's forebears were educated: one grandmother was Oberlin's first black female graduate; a great-uncle (with Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington "one of the three best-known black Americans of the nineteenth century," Rampersad writes) had served as a diplomat and in Congress; his grandmother's first husband fought and died with John Brown at Harpers Ferry; his father prospered in Mexico as the director of a utilities company. Langston's upbringing was equally exceptional for a black child in the early twentieth century. Although racial slights were inescapable, he nevertheless never attended a Jim Crow educational institution; indeed, he was voted to class honors in elementary and high school. In 1923, when he was being lauded for the racial consciousness of the poem "The Weary Blues," he had lived more among white people than black. He reflected that he needed three years at Lincoln University before he felt comfortable with its predominantly black student body. ("Only now," he wrote in 1929, "am I beginning to be at ease and without any self-consciousness in meeting my own people.") Hughes would not settle in Harlem until 1941, finally buying a house there in 1948.

"He would *need* the race, and would need to appease the race, to an extent felt by few other blacks, and by no other important black writer," Rampersad writes. His literary inspiration was a mixture of Oedipal rebellion and emotional compensation. Ignored by both parents as a child (as an adult his favorite record, Rampersad reports "spun in his bachelor suite late into the Harlem night," was Billie Holiday's "God Bless the Child,"), the young Langston, like many a lonely youngster, lost himself in books—"nothing but books and the wonderful world of books," he wrote in his autobiography *The Big Sea*, "where if people suffered, they suffered in beautiful language." His father was not only coldly unsympathetic—"A writer? Do they make any money?"—but, exaggerating the manner of much of the black

upper crust, contemptuously Negrophobic. "My father hated Negroes," Hughes wrote. ("Look at the niggers," he told the fifteen-year-old Langston at the sight of blacks in a cotton field). "What James Hughes hated, Langston Hughes would love," Rampersad writes; "what his father loved, Langston would spurn."

"Perhaps the mission of an artist is to interpret beauty to the people,—the beauty within themselves," Hughes wrote Vachel Lindsay in 1925. "That is what I want to do, if I consciously want to do anything with poetry." This quality of forced empathy is evident in verses like "Brothers":

> We are related—you and I.
> You from the West Indies,
> I from Kentucky.

His assumption of literary blackface created the occasional comic mishap. On his first excursion to Africa, in 1923, he was dismayed when "the Africans looked at me and would not believe I was a Negro." Instead, "they looked at my copper-brown skin and straight black hair . . . and they said: 'You—white man.'" Equally mortifying was an encounter in 1925 when the would-be poet of the blues encountered its empress, Bessie Smith. When Hughes asked what was her theory of the blues, she snorted that all she knew was the music had put her "in de money."

Like Bert Williams, Hughes needed to study his chosen subject. Describing "the shiftless darkey," the holy fool that was his brilliant creation, Williams commented, "I must study his movements—I have to, he's not in me." (Williams spent his off hours in his home library reading Goethe and Omar Khayyám. Hughes's poems similarly suppressed his considerable cosmopolitanism. Although he devoted much of his career to translations of Mexican, Cuban, Haitian, and Spanish writers, Hughes excluded his literary sophistication from his own poetry.) For his part, Hughes, as Rampersad writes, had to "learn basic truths about African American culture as a whole before he could be at home among those he eagerly saluted in his verse." At his best, he could revive and dignify dialect poetry (a genre reviled by Renaissance mandarins) for the magnificent portraiture in what is, perhaps, his finest creation, "Mother to Son":

> Well, son, I'll tell you:
> Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
> It's had tacks in it,
> And splinters,
> And boards torn up,
> And places with no carpet on the floor—
> Bare.
> But all the time I'se been a-climbin' on,
> And reachin' landin's,
> And turnin' corners,
> And sometimes goin' in the dark
> Where there ain't been no light.
> So, boy, don't you turn back.
> Don't you set down on the steps.
> 'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
> Don't you fall now—
> For I'se still goin', honey,
> I'se still climbin',
> And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

In a decision perhaps equally radical, Hughes also decided to earn his living through his pen, a first in black American history; the artworks of the Renaissance, for the most part, were subsidized by white philanthropy, not black patronage. The Depression limited the number of black Southern schools that could pay his fee of fifty dollars—often reduced to ten dollars, or even "hospitality and a share of the gate." For most of his career, until his death in 1967, Hughes functioned as what he called "a literary sharecropper . . . on a publisher's plantation." The only writer of the Renaissance to enjoy an extended career, Hughes published more than forty books in a variety of genres: fiction, autobiography, libretti, anthologies, and children's books, as well as poetry. He repeatedly signed book contracts to keep the wolf from the door: "Just signed contracts for TWO new books today, and haven't even started the last TWO I've spent advances on," he wrote as late as 1961. Most of the letters in the newly published *Selected Letters of Langston Hughes*, edited by Rampersad, David Roessel, and Christa Fratantoro, are financial laments ("Checks, so far, are conspicuous by their absence").[1]

1 *Selected Letters of Langston Hughes*, edited by Arnold Rampersad & David Roessel with Christa Fratantoro; Knopf, 480 pages, $35.

Stage-struck from childhood, he was forever "entangled in that unprofitable thing known as show business," achieving limited success only in 1947 with the musical *Street Scene*, buoyed by the talent of Elmer Rice and the genius of Kurt Weill. "If you want to die, be disturbed, maladjusted, neurotic and psychotic, disappointed and disjointed," he wrote wryly, "just write plays! Go ahead!" Hollywood was even more frustrating. Responding in 1952 to an inquiry about the anti-Communist blacklist, he crisply stated, "Negro writers, being black, have always been blacklisted in radio and TV. Only once in a blue moon are any colored writers given an opportunity to do a script and then, usually, with no regular, and no credits. . . . My agent stated flatly, 'It is just about impossible to sell a Negro writer to Hollywood or radio, and they use Negro subject matter very rarely.'"

Whatever the virtues of adversity, for Hughes forced production was not one of them. Too much of his later poetry seems formulaic; his career continued but his talent did not advance. James Baldwin, with whom Hughes shared a relationship of subterranean bitchery (in a congratulatory note on the publication of *Nobody Knows My Name*, Hughes jibed, "Hope it makes the best-seller list. You might as well suffer in comfort"), undoubtedly had ulterior motives in a 1959 *New York Times Book Review* when he wrote, "Every time I read Langston Hughes, I am amazed all over again by his genuine gifts—and depressed that he has done so little with them." The criticism echoed that found seventeen years before in the *Book Review*, which praised the emotional force of the poems in *Shakespeare in Harlem*, but declared that "neither his imagination nor his intelligence comes anywhere near the strength of his emotions."

The turning point for Hughes came during the years of the Popular Front, when he, like most of the Harlem intelligentsia, supported the Communist Party, in large part because of its vigorous support of the Scottsboro Boys. It was a near-perfect matrix to combine his adolescent resentment of bourgeois respectability with his desire to produce a people's poetry—radicalism as literary populism, to borrow again from Kazin. Although he felt "my real métier is protesting about something," the Red Decade saw him produce sophomore japery on the order of "Good Morning Revolution":

> Good morning Revolution:
> You are the best friend
> I ever had.
> We gonna pal around together from now on. . . .
>
> I been starvin' too long
> Ain't you?
>
> Let's go, Revolution!

and "One More 'S' in the U.S.A.":

> Put one more S in the U.S.A.
> To make it Soviet.
> One more S in the U.S.A.
> Oh, we'll live to see it yet. . . .

Hughes backed away from being the Party's literary black poster child, passing the torch to Richard Wright, when the association threatened his livelihood ("the only thing I can do is to string along with the Left until maybe someday all us poor folks will get enough to eat"), and was a cooperative witness before Senator Joseph McCarthy's Senate Permanent Sub-Committee on Investigations. In the spirit of the Harlem Renaissance, he continued his virtually uncritical boosterism; he publicly praised black writers about whose work he had private reservations, like Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin. (Impelled as much by private need as political consideration, he thought black writers should present the smiling aspects of black life.) However, he was also uncommonly generous to young talent: writers benefitting from his encouragement and connections include Wright, Baldwin, Ellison, Gwendolyn Brooks, Alice Walker, Pauli Murray, and Margaret Walker Alexander.

Just as he had adapted his verse to blues, then jazz, his late work attempted to appropriate bebop; if some results were trifling ("Life is fine! Fine as wine! Life is fine!"), it also inspired the work that has kept him alive in the popular mind—what news report on race relations does *not* trot out "a dream deferred"? In fairness, the fame of "Harlem" (1951) derives from Lorraine Hansberry's use of one of its images as the title of

her most famous play, and, in fairness to Hughes, the entire poem warrants quotation:

> What happens to a dream deferred?
>
> Does it dry up
> like a raisin in the sun?
> Or fester like a sore—
> And then run?
> Does it stink like rotten meat?
> Or crust and sugar over—
> like a syrupy sweet?
>
> Maybe it just sags
> like a heavy load.
>
> *Or does it explode?*

His protest poetry always teetered between the profound and the puerile; deciding which is which probably depends on the reader's sympathies. On the one hand is "Let America Be America Again":

> Let America be America again.
> Let it be the dream it used to be.
> Let it be the pioneers on the plain
> Seeking a home where he himself is free.
>
> (America was never America to me.) . . .

On the other is "Here to Stay":

> . . . They done beat me and mistreat me
> Barrel-staved and enslaved me,
> Lynched me, run me, and Jim Crowed me
> Acted like they never knowed me.
>
> But I'm here, still here—
> And I intend to be!
> It'll never be *that* easy, white folks,
> To get rid of me.

If, as Rampersad writes in the introduction to the *Selected Letters*, "Hughes's life was a struggle that he won," his was a victory beyond the public adoration in which he basked for his last decade: election to the National Institute of Arts and Letters, winning the NAACP's highest honor, the Spingarn Medal, a presidential appointment in 1966 as the country's official representative to the First World Festival of Negro Arts in Senegal. His greatest triumph was psychic survival. Other than his paeans to black beauty, his second principal subject was death—"Dear Lovely Death," as he entitled one of his collections, "That taketh all things under his wing." The existential despair felt by the fifteen-year-old who, feeling abandoned by both parents, put his father's pistol to his head "and wondered if I would be any happier if I pulled the trigger" induced much of his finest verse. Consider "Suicide's Note," a brilliant poem that also displays his (acknowledged) debt to Amy Lowell:

> The calm,
> Cool face of the river
> Asked me for a kiss.

In "Summer Night," Hughes—who never married or had children, whose emotional life was so guarded that argument remains as to whether he was gay, straight, or asexual—ponders how inadequately the adoration of many substitutes for the devotion of one:

> My soul
> Empty as the silence,
> Empty with a vague,
> Aching emptiness
> Desiring,
> Needing someone,
> Something.

If ever a poet exemplified T. S. Eliot's dictum that poetry is an "an escape from emotion . . . an escape from personality," it was Langston Hughes. His preoccupation with death was a "gloomy, brackish pool," Rampersad writes, "out of which this poetic power emerges, and which it aims mightily to transcend." As Eliot continues, "only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things." If one wishes Hughes had said more, it must be conceded that he said his share:

> Though you may hear me holler,
> And you may see me cry—
> I'll be dogged, sweet baby,
> If you gonna see me die.

Poems

From "Works and Days," by Hesiod

translated by A. E. Stallings

Hesiod lived and composed in Greece in the latter part of the eighth century B.C. The ancients considered him a contemporary of Homer, but whereas we know nothing personal about Homer—not even if he or she was one, two, or many—Hesiod tells us a lot about himself and is the first Western writer to give us his own biography. The *Works and Days* is not the first Western poem, but Hesiod is arguably our first poet, and certainly our first "prize-winning" poet.

Hesiod relates that his father, being not overly successful in merchant shipping, emigrated from the Greek colony of Cymae in Asia Minor to Boeotia in mainland Greece, settling in the village of Askra ("wretched in winter, nasty in summer, never pleasant"), about as far inland as you can go without catching sight again of the sea. Hesiod prefers farming to the vicissitudes of waiting for ships to come in. He himself only made one sea voyage, crossing the tiny strait over to the island of Euboea (a mere 125 feet wide at its narrowest)—a geographical joke. There he won a poetry contest and carried off a bronze tripod, which he dedicates to the Muses, who had, after all, personally given him his divine gift for song. (No, really: in his *Theogony*, he runs into them while pasturing his lambs on Mt. Helicon—they breathe the gift into him despite their poor opinion of shepherds generally.)

Hesiod addresses his didactic poem to his brother, Perses, with whom he is embroiled in a lawsuit over their paternal legacy. Hesiod claims that Perses has already taken more than his share and suggests that the judges are corrupt and open to bribery ("gift-guzzlers"). Some of Hesiod's discursive lecture is on justice, some is on farm management, and household economy, and then there is an almanac section on the right and wrong days for assorted activities. Even though Perses has grabbed more than his due, he appears to be hard up, a work-shy wastrel.

Hesiod's principal concern is with justice, justice being the squaring of oneself with the gods, one's fellow men (neighbors and kin), and the rhythms of the earth. Religious observance, basic manners (don't clip your fingernails at the public feast!), and watching the constellations all go some way towards keeping oneself in right relationships, but above all honest toil is required.

I live in Greece, a transplant from over the sea. Translating this poem during the Greek financial crisis, I have, to my surprise, found it topical and resonant. The ancient poem speaks eerily to the moment, with its concerns about debt, corruption, justice, employment, and poverty. And who in Greece is *not* in a lawsuit with his brother over an inherited property? (Greece still lacks, disastrously, a complete land registry.) When Hesiod declares, disgustedly, that "this is an iron age indeed," it is a line that could be spray-painted on the walls of Parliament. The *Works and Days*, far from being a fusty relic, demonstrates Pound's dictum: "literature is news that stays news."

Ode to Work (287–411)

Bad's had for the taking, woes galore,
The road is smooth and short—She lives next door.
The strait and narrow path the gods have set
To Virtue is steep and long and paved with sweat.
It's hard going at first, but by the time
You reach the peak, it seems an easy climb
Uphill as it is.
That man is best
Who thinks for himself, and puts all to the test,
Weighing the ends and outcomes. It will suffice
Even to heed another's good advice.
But he who can't think for himself, nor once
Learn from another is a useless dunce.

Perses! Heroes' blood runs through your veins!
Take what I've said to heart. Start taking pains—
Work keeps the wolf of famine from the door;
Revered Demeter smiles and fills your store.
But famine dogs the heels of those who shirk,
And gods and men shun him who will not work.
He's like blunt-bottomed drones who take their ease
While gobbling up the labor of the bees.
Look to your work, order your chores with reason,
So that barns groan with harvest in due season.
It's work that prospers men, and makes them rich
In heads of livestock, and it's working which
Endears you to the immortals. There's no shame
In working, but in shirking, much to blame.
And if you work, the man who twiddles his thumbs
Is quick to envy you grown rich. Wealth comes
With fame and honor in her retinue.
With work, you better what's allotted you.
Don't covet the possessions of your neighbor:
Turn your foolish heart. Look to your labor,
Secure your living; as I bid you, heed.
Shame's no provider for the man in need,
Shame who can harm a man or make him grand:
For Shame and poverty go hand in hand;
Bold goes with riches. Property should not
Be up for grabs. God-given's better got.
For if somebody seizes some great prize

By force of arms, or burgles with his lies,
As often happens when greed tricks the mind
And brazen Shamelessness leaves Shame behind,
With ease, the gods obscure him: all he reaps
Is a dwindled house; wealth isn't his for keeps.
The same for him who wrongs a guest or harms
A suppliant, or takes into his arms
His brother's wife behind his brother's back,
Indecent deed! or him who in his lack
Of scruples swindles orphans, or in rage
At his father on the cruel sill of age
Hurls bruising words at him. This man incurs
The wrath of Zeus, and gets what he deserves.

But turn your witless mind from all such vice.
According to your means, make sacrifice
With a clean, right spirit, to the gods, and burn
Bright thigh-bones on the altar, and in turn
Give votives and libations, both at night
And at the first return of holy light,
So heaven smiles on you and your affairs,
And none bids for your land, but you for theirs.

Invite a friend but not a foe to feast—
Invite the man close by not last nor least;
If something bad should happen on your farm,
Neighbors arrive half-dressed at the alarm;
Kinsmen, belted. A bad neighbor's a curse,
As a good one is a dream—quite the reverse.
Who has a trusty neighbor, you'll allow,
Has a share in something precious. Nary a cow
Would be lost, but for bad neighbors. Keep good track
When you measure from your neighbor, pay him back
Good measure too; better, if in your power;
You'll find him steadfast in a needful hour.

Don't profit wickedly. Ill-gotten gains
Amount to nothing more than woes and banes.
Befriend a friend, meet compromise half-way.
Give to a giver, but to a tight-fist, nay.
Give begets gift; grasp, grudge. For Give is breath
While Seize is Evil, and her wages, death.
Who gives with open hands, though great the gift,

Rejoices in it and his spirits lift.
But he who steals, trusting in brazen vice,
Though small the theft, congeals his heart to ice.

Deposit even small amounts, but do
It often, and you'll find that they accrue.
He wards off sun-burnt famine who can add
To what he has. To store at home's not bad;
Outside is risky. To take from what you've got
Is fine, to be in need of what you've not
Is woe to the spirit. Mind you, that's how things are.

Drink deeply from new-broached or near-drained jar.
Thrift's for half-way; thrift's stingy at the end.
Ensure the settled payment for a friend;
Smile on a brother, but have a witness, when
Trust and mistrust alike have ruined men.

Don't let a woman mystify your mind
With sweet talk and the sway of her behind—
She's just after your barn. He who believes
A woman is a man who trusts in thieves.
May an only son shore up his father's walls,
For that's how wealth amasses in the halls.
May he die full of years and leave one son
Behind in turn. (Though it were easily done
For Zeus to bestow untold wealth on more—
More hands, more chores done, and a fuller store.)
But if it's wealth you long for in your chest,
Then do this: work on work and never rest.

When Atlas' daughters rise, the Pleiades,
Start harvesting, plough at their setting. These
Are hidden forty days and forty nights,
But as the year goes round, once more their lights
Appear, when it's time to hone the iron tool.
On the plains and for men near the sea, one rule
Applies, also for everyone who dwells
Far from the shore, among the glens and dells,
Rich country: naked sow, and naked plough,
And reap your harvest naked. This is how
You'll gather all Demeter's works in season
Ripe in due time, so there will be no reason

For you to beg in vain from door to door
As you've come to me now. I'll give no more,
No extra. Foolish Perses—work! again,
Work at the work gods have marked out for men,
Lest sick at heart, with wife and kids, you find
You beg from neighbors and they pay no mind.
It might work twice or thrice; you'll waste your breath
However, if you pester them to death,
Your words broadcast in vain. I'd urge you heed:
Think how to clear debts and not starve. You'll need
A woman and an ox to start a life:
A ploughing ox; bondswoman, not a wife,
One who can follow oxen, and prepare
The household's needs and management with care,
Lest you go begging and be turned away,
And fruits of your labor dwindle day by day.
Don't put off till tomorrow or till later—
No barn is filled by a procrastinator.

Reflections

Tintern Abbey

by Anthony Daniels

It is two hundred and seventeen years since Wordsworth visited Tintern Abbey for the second time, five years after his first visit, and then composed his celebrated *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey*; there have been some changes at the Abbey since. The vegetation that in Wordsworth's time grew in and on the ancient walls has been cleared away, for it would eventually have ruined the ruins. But that, as you might have guessed, is not the greatest change.

I doubt that in 1798, the date of the poem, there would have been a notice informing him that ancient monuments can be dangerous, followed by an enumeration of the various hazards consequent upon visiting them, with little schematic pictures of these hazards to aid those lacking in reading comprehension. For example, there were "uneven, steep or narrow stairs" with a man falling backwards to the ground. Another man fell forwards down the "Unexpected drops," and a second man backwards because of "Uneven and slippery surfaces." Then there was a man who hit his head on the "Low headroom," clutching it in pain afterwards, and another man clutching his head because he had failed to take account of advice to "Let your eyes adjust to the darkness."

I regret that the notice impeded my Wordsworthian reverie. Sublimity wasn't in it. Not "elevated thoughts; a sense sublime/ Of something far more deeply interfused," but rather a naggingly jejune question: exactly how many visitors a year are injured at Tintern Abbey? How many, for example, fall down "unexpected drops" and have to be rescued, or hit their heads on "low headroom" and suffer concussion? And then, because I am a doctor who is now enjoined to practice according to the scientific evidence, another unromantic question occurred to me: what is the evidence that a notice informing people of the hazards actually reduces the number of injuries?

I didn't ask the very nice lady at the squat ugly gate taking entrance fees how many people had been injured in (or is it by?) the Abbey while she had been on duty: she would have thought I was mad, possibly dangerously so. (Another necessary sign? Beware of visiting madmen.) But even if the answer had been "None," that would not have settled the matter, for it might have been argued that it was the notice—that I observed no one except me reading—that was the cause of this happy outcome.

Therefore the following experiment suggested itself to my mind: the notice should be displayed for a period and then taken down for a similar period, the experiment to last two years so that the results could be controlled for the season and weather, the muddiness of the ground and so forth. Of course, no experiment of this nature could be quite perfect, or establish answers beyond peradventure: one can never control for all the possible variables. "Further research" (and further funding) is always called for, but at least my experiment would give a first approximation to an answer.

Having had such thoughts aroused in me by Tintern Abbey, they continued for a time as if on rails: not "thoughts of deep seclusion" but of health and safety. Where were the defibrillators? I looked around and saw none. And what of wheelchair access? Again none. No models of the Abbey, either, for blind visitors to feel, as there are now cloth pictures below the paintings in some galleries for them to feel. I know that a few people might object on grounds of diminished beauty, but what is beauty to compare with health, safety, and equal opportunity? How many ecstatic transports by beauty are equal to one life saved? What if it were *your* life saved, what would you think then?

Further to reduce the sublimity of one's thoughts, there is the car park that takes up one side of the Abbey grounds. I shouldn't complain, perhaps, because I myself had come by car, though if the car park had been located a mile away instead of being immediately adjacent to the Abbey I should have been happy to walk, but it was all the others who had come by car that I really objected to. And I am afraid that, against all my principles and better judgment, I entered after lunch the kitsch gift shop in front of the Abbey and bought some Tintern Abbey fudge, both rum raisin and what was called "classic," and ate too much of it too quickly, feeling slightly sick immediately afterwards. My only excuse was that the bag it came in did not warn me in advance that eating too much fudge too quickly could make you feel sick: though frankness compels me also to admit that this was not the first time in my life that such a thing had happened to me. I am, alas, a modern man, not very different from my peers.

Lost in the ruins themselves, however, some semblance of Wordsworth's ecstasy at escaping "the fever of the world" in the valley of the "sylvan Wye" returns. Ruins, even of undistinguished buildings in grubby surroundings, are inherently thought- or emotion-provoking; few are totally unsusceptible to their intimations of mortality, to adapt slightly another Wordsworthian phrase. But dull would he be of soul—Wordsworth again—who would remain unmoved by these remains of a thirteenth-century Cistercian abbey, in whose precincts men renounced the world for prayer and contemplation. As one looks at the stonework tracery—could we produce the like today?—and the woods beyond that are framed in that tracery, one almost hears the silence interrupted only by the monks' chant, the birds, and the "sweet inland murmur" of the river nearby.

Almost, but not quite. The world is too much with us, not only getting and spending, as Wordsworth put it, but by the noises it makes. The Duke of Wellington, who was born and died within a year or two of Wordsworth, regretted the coming of the railways (there was a station at Tintern, no longer in use, and trippers now have to come by motor vehicle) because he thought they would enable the lower classes to move about, "unnecessarily" in his opinion.

We laugh now at what the Duke said: at least we laugh if we are not infuriated or appalled by it. Who was he to say whether or not another person's journey was necessary? What about labor mobility, allowing a man otherwise unemployed easily to move to where work is available? Should he be kept immobile merely to preserve the beauty of the countryside for those capable of appreciating it? And why should he not appreciate it himself, merely because he is of the lower class?

But at Tintern I could not quite avoid Wellingtonian sentiment insinuating itself into my mind (without, of course, applying it to myself), partly conjured by Wordsworth's poem:

> And now, with gleams of half-extinguish'd thought,
> With many recognitions dim and faint,
> And somewhat of a sad perplexity . . .

For the fact is that, at Tintern, the air is never quite free of traffic noise, no doubt the louder for its being in a valley, a single car disturbing the peace a minute at a time, for you can hear the roar of the tires on the tarmac a long way off as it approaches and recedes. Not "the still, sad music of humanity," but the perpetual noise of mass society—of which, I admit, I am a full member.

The private car is supposed to be a symbol of personal liberty, as were the railways once so regretted by the Duke. No doubt the symbolism is partially accurate, but in a small and densely populated country such as England, the profusion of motor vehicles—34.6 million, giving an average traffic density more than five times greater than that of the United States—has not had a beneficial aesthetic influence on the country, to say the least. A larger and larger number of people travel to see less and less: aesthetically, the country is an ass's skin, contracting and contracting, to borrow Balzac's image. The exigencies of travel (I include myself in these strictures) spread the most dispiriting mess everywhere, and little remains untouched.

Nor does travel to that little untouched mean that people appreciate it. I arrived at Tintern in an agitated state of mind, caused not as in Wordsworth's case by "the fretful stir unprofitable," but by the immense quantity of litter strewn along the side of the road practically the whole of the way from my home, about seventy miles through the still-beautiful countryside of Shropshire, Herefordshire, Gloucestershire, and Monmouthshire. The "hedge-row, hardly hedge-rows, little lines/ Of sportive wood run wild" are now also long, extended litter bins into which people from their cars sling bottles, cans, wrappers, and plastic bags (that catch in the hedges and flap in the wind), either not caring whether they remain there or assuming that someone else will clean up after them, as infants do if not corrected.

It does not take many steps of the imagination to see in this littering a phenomenon of deepest political and social significance: both the littering in the first place and the failure to do anything about it, indeed the lack of general or publicly expressed concern about it, despite the private anguish of innumerable citizens.

The failure of the public authorities to keep roadsides clean as once they did is but a single instance of the growing incompetence and moral corruption of the British public administration, itself a consequence of national decomposition. Though nearly a half of the British economy is in the public sector, so elementary a duty as cleaning up litter is quite beyond it, and the bloated administration has allowed matters to go so far that they would be reparable only by a colossal effort.

But what of the people themselves who litter? There must be thousands, millions of them. What is going through their minds as they hurl the packaging of their refreshments into the still-exquisite beauty of the Wye Valley, on to "the banks of this delightful stream"? Either they don't care, or they don't see: and, if they don't see, is it because the real world is now less important to them, psychologically less real, than the virtual world in which they increasingly live and move and take their being? And why so much need for refreshment in the first place? What permanency of appetite makes it so imperative for them to carry food and drink in their vehicles when they are seldom more than a few minutes from a shop, cafe, or restaurant?

One might have hoped, at least, that litter and littering found no intellectual defenders, but not so. Writing in the *Guardian* newspaper a few days before my trip to Tintern, an academic historian and journalist named Kathryn Hughes criticized a woman called Kirstie Allsopp who had seen a man throw litter from his car and then put the number of his license plate on Twitter. I am not myself in favor of this kind of public denunciation, but such was only part of the criticism the author of the article leveled at the Twitterer:

> It strikes me that behind Allsopp's apparently commonsense approach to people who litter the streets lies the toxic conviction that her values are the right ones, the ones by which the rest of us should live.

In other words, it is a matter of genuine debate whether people should litter the streets and countryside or not: perhaps littering is right, or at least not wrong, after all.

The writer continued in best philosophical or academic style:

> To adapt the anthropologist Mary Douglas's classic formulation of dirt, litter is merely matter out of place. Restore it to its rightful surround-

> ings—the wastepaper basket, the street bin, the recycling box—and order is resumed.

And then comes the clinching argument:

> But who decides what that proper place is? Kirstie Allsopp, apparently, and anyone else who feels that their values are so obviously the right ones that it gives them the moral authority to take the law into their own hands when they come across someone who thinks differently.

Setting aside the ethics of the Twittering in such a case, the author wants to leave us with a radical doubt as to whether littering is wrong. Perhaps it is ethically permissible to throw your cans and bottles "Among the woods and copses . . . with their green and simple hue."

Certainly, when I have asked litterers to desist, some of them have suddenly turned moral philosopher and asked me for the Cartesian point from which I infallibly deduce that littering is wrong. They have been treated all their lives to arguments such as that of Kathryn Hughes and though they might never have read her they will certainly be able to produce her argument exactly.

For the upper-middle-class Hughes, Allsopp's real sin was her "smug middle-class morality." Hughes failed to appreciate that this implied that, for her, proletarians, *ex officio*, are messy and dirty. In other words, she has looked on the British lower orders as did the Duke of Wellington and pronounced them, as he did, the scum of the earth. Her main difference with the Iron Duke is that she professes to see nothing wrong with being the scum of the earth, though of course she doesn't really believe this. She only writes it in the *Guardian*.

Alas, I am more different from Wordsworth than is she from the Duke of Wellington. I cannot say:

> Though absent long,
> These forms of beauty have not been to me,
> As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
> But oft, in lonely rooms, and mid the din
> Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
> In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
> Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart,
> And passing even into my purer mind
> With tranquil restoration . . .

No: the world is too much with me.

Theater

History lessons

by Andrew Stuttaford

For a one-man play to work, it needs a very, very good script-writer. Back in the early 1990s, I saw Patrick Stewart's *A Christmas Carol*. I would watch Stewart in just about anything, but with Dickens supplying the words, well, it was the best of times.

Ronald Keaton has yet to reach the heights of the great Shakespearian, Starfleet captain, and mutant mentor. But this familiar presence on the Chicago stage and quite a bit more besides (manager, director, playwright, fund-raiser, composer, singer) often turned to the best for many of the lines deployed in his single-handed *Churchill* at New York's New World Stages. He adapted the script from Churchill's own words (and from a Reagan-era TV play by James C. Humes, an assiduous laborer in the Churchill mines).

Keaton's *Churchill* enjoyed a successful debut in Chicago and moved to New York in February. The setting is the United States in 1946. Churchill is traveling to Fulton, Missouri, to make *that* speech. Just a year before, British voters had thrown him out of office, scarcely two months after the defeat of Germany. "It may be a blessing in disguise," soothed Churchill's wife on Election Day. "Well," he said, "at the moment it's certainly very well disguised." That exchange made it into Keaton's show. The crowd loved it. This Churchill guy has a future on Broadway.

The laughter was loud enough to suggest that this was the first time that most in the audience had heard that famous reply. If that *was* the case they didn't know their Churchill too well. But that they were there at all meant that they knew something and wanted to know more. Overall, Keaton comes across as too likeable, too accessible to be a completely convincing Churchill, a man who, outside his family, could easily play the monument. Keaton has a resemblance of sorts to a rather mangy Last Lion, but he doesn't sound much like him. The curious intonation is absent; too much American is present. Neither Albert Finney nor Robert Hardy has anything to fear.

Keaton's more intimate approach was thus a smart way to go. Grand set-pieces would not have worked; instead Keaton depicts an aging statesman reminiscing over what had been, sometimes from a chair, sometimes wandering around the stage, sometimes messing with a painting. And Churchill's words carry the Chicagoan along pretty well. The greatest hits make their appearances, and so do the greatest inaccuracies. Churchill never grumbled, with reference to De Gaulle, that the "Cross of Lorraine" was the heaviest of all the wartime crosses he had to bear, nor did he joke that naval tradition was "rum, sodomy and the lash," although he did say that he'd wished he had.

The play could not possibly have crammed Churchill's contradictions and bewildering immensity into two hours, nor did it try to. A simple set, occasionally crowned by projections above the stage illustrating some of the people and places referred to in the script, reinforces the message, already signaled by a cast of one, that this is a condensed edition. Churchill's final two decades are omitted altogether, as are other well-known episodes from the previous seven and a good number of inconvenient truths.

If there is any unexpected emphasis, it is on Churchill's fraught relationship with his parents, two narcissists with little time for their adoring boy, rescued by his "Woomany," the good-hearted Nurse Everest, who gave him the love they never could—a woman to whom the world owes much.

The inner Churchill remains largely elusive, lost in a rush of half-told events, nicely delivered quips, and fragments of ringing speeches—a torrent that swept away hopes of anything more substantial, but was probably what the audience had come for: an admiring portrayal of a man they knew they were right to admire; an evening for celebration, not complication; a chance to revisit a past that had once seemed so straightforward, a past that had once been within touch. "My dad," said the lady behind me, "was on the USS Missouri."

Over at Brooklyn's Polonsky Shakespeare Center, the Theatre for a New Audience's production of Soho Rep's *An Octoroon* by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins offered a far more unsettling encounter with the past. Narrowly described, and it should *not* be narrowly described, *An Octoroon*, which won an Obie in 2014 for Best New American Play, is a response to *The Octoroon*, a hugely popular antebellum melodrama by the Irish playwright Dion Boucicault that opened in New York in 1859, and which had itself been influenced by Thomas Mayne Reid's *The Quadroon*, an implicitly even more daring novel from 1856.

Laws can sometimes appear sharpest at their edges, and the plight of the enslaved "octoroon" (someone of one-eighth African descent, and under the code of "one drop" defined as black) was not infrequently used by abolitionists as a way to draw whites' attention to the wider injustices of the Peculiar Institution. That the octoroon depicted often seems to have been a woman, and sexually exploited, is testimony both to their propagandist savvy and, occasionally, more prurient Victorian interests. The much reproduced *The Octoroon* (1868), by the English sculptor John Bell, was post–Civil War but inspired by Boucicault's drama. This octoroon has "Caucasian" features and has been stripped naked and (tastefully) chained, neither of which happens to Zoe, the eponymous octoroon of Boucicault's play, although the villain of the piece, the wicked M'Closky, clearly has something less than respectable in mind for her if he can succeed in seeing her reduced again to slavery.

The core of the story is fairly straightforward. Sophisticated George Peyton returns from the pleasures of Paris to Terrebonne, his now-deceased uncle's plantation in Louisiana. He meets and falls in love with Zoe, his uncle's daughter by one of his slaves, long since emancipated and brought up as a part of the Peyton family. The plantation is in dire straits financially. Through chicanery, murder, and a legal technicality M'Closky takes the opportunity to buy both Terrebonne and Zoe. In the end (it's complicated, but it involves implausible photographic evidence and a steamboat in flames) M'Closky is both foiled and killed, but, despite having "had the education of a [white] lady," Zoe has learned nothing from *Romeo and Juliet*: unaware of M'Closky's demise, she takes poison too soon, but lives on long enough to cede George to the Melanie Wilkes next door. In English productions of the play Zoe and George typically ended up together. Such a happy outcome, with its alarming promise of "quintroons" to come (the elaborate taxonomy is its own giveaway), might have made American theatergoers unhappy: propriety could, however, be preserved by tragedy. Zoe had to die.

Boucicault's play is an artifact of its times; the n-word runs amok and dialogue, attitudes, and dialect lag not so far behind:

> PAUL: It ain't no use now; you got to gib it up!
> WAHNOTEE: Ugh!
> PAUL: It won't do! You got dat bottle of rum hid under your blanket—gib it up now, you—Yar! [*Wrenches it from him*.] You nasty, lying Injiun! It's no use you putting on airs; I ain't gwine to sit up wid you all night and you drunk.

Did I forget to mention that the cast of characters includes, as no one would have put it in 1859, a Native American?

Seventy years later, *The New York Times* gave a broadly positive review ("an old play that wears its years honorably, even a bit jauntily") to a revival of *The Octoroon* from March 1929.

It is hard to imagine such a revival today except as an exercise in the highest camp, complete with more trigger warnings than the preparations for Passchendaele. There was none of that in 1929. The reviewer noted approvingly that the cast played it straight: "not once did the players 'kid' their parts, not once was fun made of the hoary septuagenarian," although his observation that the audience "finally got around to hissing" M'Closky hints that the performance might not have been conducted in an atmosphere of total seriousness.

The trick that Mr. Jacobs-Jenkins pulls off (and pulls off brilliantly) in a complex, multilayered play that uses this ancient melodrama as its own foundation, is not to reject camp but to embrace it. With the additional assistance of slapstick, absurdity, some very dark humor, and one particularly horrific interlude, Mr. Jacobs-Jenkins uses the contrast between the audience's laughter and the tragic story that it is watching to build an uneasy tension that lingers long after the play is over.

That said, *An Octoroon* opens more than a little uncertainly with a monologue by "BJJ" (Austin Smith) in underwear and a grouchy mood, complaining sometimes amusingly, sometimes not, about his life, the trials of being an African-American playwright ("BJJ" might *just possibly* refer to Branden Jacobs-Jenkins), gradually applying whiteface as he does so, grim omens of a trying, eat-your-greens evening ahead. Eventually, BJJ, who has by now admitted to liking and trying to adapt *The Octoroon*, is joined on stage by "Playwright" (Haynes Thigpen). The two swap insults for no obvious reason. BJJ storms off leaving Playwright alone. He turns out to be a caricature of Boucicault, heavily drunk, heavily Irish, and mightily peeved that he's been forgotten not much more than a century after his death. He had been a "fecking world-class famous fecking playwright." And so he was: some of you feckers didn't know? Playwright is joined by an assistant (Ian Lassiter), starts applying redface, and preparing for a production to come. This sequence ends with him, by then in full Indian headdress, dancing around to some rhythm-heavy music that, like almost everything that had preceded it, goes on too long.

Then the scenery shifts dramatically (well done, Mimi Lien), transformed into some sort of Terrebonne and everything is quickly forgiven. Jacobs-Jenkins, his writing energized by the dialogue with the long-dead Boucicault, weaves in and out of the Irishman's play, adding, subtracting, toying, teasing, and, while he's at it, reducing the fourth wall to rubble. Some of Boucicault's characters vanish altogether; others are reduced to a reference. Two younger slaves, Dido and Minnie, a Greek chorus of sorts, both comment—in caustic, distinctly twenty-first-century language—on the proceedings and, directly or indirectly, on a life both monotonous and arbitrary, one in which they can be sold, split off from their families, torn away from everything they know, *used*.

MINNIE: Whatchu think of the new mas'r?
DIDO: Mas'r George?
MINNIE: Yeah.
DIDO: He a'ight. He don't seem to really know what he doin' just yet but he'll figure it out. Having slaves can't be that hard.
MINNIE: Would you fuck him?
DIDO: No, Minnie! Damn! Would you?
(Beat. She would.)
MINNIE: But I kind of get the feeling you don't really get a say in the matter.

Meanwhile the plot whirls on. Austin Smith reappears in whiteface as both George and M'Closky, and is superb as both. His George is a sly rendering of the performance that being a cultivated, well-traveled Southern gentleman must have been. He's good-hearted enough, but about to be hoist on the petard of his own culture's rules, rules that, up to then, haven't troubled him too much:

GEORGE: How I enjoy the folksy ways of the niggers down here. All the ones I've ever known were either filthy ape-like Africans of Paris or the flashy uppity darkies of New York. Here, though, the negro race is so quaint and vibrant and colorful—much like the landscape. And so full of wisdom and cheer and tall tales. I should write a book. Why Pete was telling me a wonderful folktale, have you heard it? It's about a rabbit. . . .

Mr. Smith's M'Closky is a moustache-twirling delight, a leering, crouching, shifty-eyed, silent movie villain (a version of Boucicault's play was filmed in 1913, and sometimes given the telling, both more disturbing and less, alternative title of *The White Slave*: disappointingly I was unable to navigate the Polish website where it may or may not lurk). Eventually, Mr. Smith's M'Closky and Mr. Smith's Peyton have words, and then start fighting. I don't like slapstick, but I do like the absurd, and, as Mr. Smith brawls with himself—a drawn-out, sprawling, somersaulting melée (complete with knife)—this play reaches a pinnacle of glorious delirium, reinforced by the blackfaced Ian Lassiter's wildly exaggerated, cleverly subversive versions of old Pete, a madcap Uncle Remus, and young Paul, an older, scallywag Buckwheat. The cellist (Lester St. Louis) playing César Alvarez's gorgeous music from the side of the stage couldn't stop smiling. I just laughed aloud. Oh yes, there was a Harvey-sized Br'er Rabbit who periodically strolled onto the stage to perform some chore or—why not?—just stare at the audience. On some accounts, the man in the rabbit mask was none other than Mr. Jacobs-Jenkins himself—lovely if true.

But Mr. Jacobs-Jenkins may have worried that he had made it too easy to laugh away the nightmare that must lie at the root of any play about slavery. And so BJJ and Playwright introduce the fourth act by explaining that in melodramas that is the act in which the moral is to be found. After a sequence in which Wahnotee barely avoids being strung up by an angry crowd, a large image of an actual lynching is displayed. Photographic evidence of a killing has a crucial role in the play, but now the silenced, silent audience was compelled to contemplate fact, not fiction: the murder of two men, left swinging from the end of barbarism's ropes.

Hideous though that sight is, it is, in some respects, equaled in horror by the moment when a numbed, broken Zoe (touchingly played by Amber Gray), a slave again, is once more turned into an object. She is just "the octoroon" now, a chattel going for fifteen thousand, going for twenty thousand, gone for twenty-five thousand: sold.

At the New York Theatre Workshop, David Greig's *The Events* confronts a more recent atrocity, the 2011 killing spree by Anders Breivik, who one terrible July day blew up eight people in central Oslo and then shot dead sixty-nine of the participants at a summer camp organized by a socialist youth group on the nearby island of Utøya.

Unwilling to make this a play just about Breivik and his crime, Greig moves the setting to his native Scotland, and changes much of the back story. His focus is on the aftermath of a murderous attack and, specifically, its effect on Claire, the leftish, lesbian female vicar (Neve McIntosh) who runs the choir that was its target. The choir was proudly diverse and a natural target for the Boy (Clifford Samuel) on a self-appointed mission to protect his people from being overrun by immigrant masses, but not just that. Amongst his jumble of motives is a longing to make a mark on the world too: "The only means I have are art or violence. And I was never any good at drawing."

The play is often oblique, and it is more than a touch in love with itself. Its success in conveying a sense of sadness and loss owes a great deal to the strength of McIntosh's performance as Claire tries to understand an event that has shattered her faith in her God, in herself, and in her certainties. In quiet desperation she staggers from abandoned answer to abandoned answer. As she does so, she meets a series of characters (all played by Mr. Samuel) all of whom, in their different ways, shed some light on what happened while leaving her still in darkness. And at the heart of that darkness is the Boy himself, inadequate, lost, dangerous, and deeply disturbed, but maybe not quite insane enough to give Claire the reassurance that a diagnosis of insanity might bring.

The Events is not helped by the gimmicky decision to feature a different "real" choir at each performance, singing along to what has been described, inaccurately, as a "soaring" soundtrack. This soared to some sort of nadir at the play's otherwise intriguing time-shifting conclusion (does the drama end with the *prelude* to the massacre?) when the audience was invited to join in the singing of a song named "We're All Here." This may have worked in Norway, but in New York it merely felt like an invitation to wallow in the tears of others.

Art

Piero di Cosimo in Washington

by Marco Grassi

One simply doesn't associate Florentine Renaissance art with whimsical invention and bizarre grotesquery. We know all too well about that city's devotion to proportion, equilibrium, and symmetry. Anyone who has visited the city will have passed—but probably not noticed—the façade of Palazzo Bartolini Salimbeni. The lovely Piazza Santa Trinita, which it faces, functions as a gateway to Via Tornabuoni—and far more familiar destinations: Bulgari, Gucci, and the one or two traditional local shops that can still afford the rent. But Palazzo Bartolini is worth a second look. Designed by Baccio d'Agnolo in 1520, it is the very essence of high-style Florentine Renaissance decorum and clarity; every element of its classical vocabulary is quietly but emphatically *necessary* and is in its divinely allotted place. If it were a painting, it would be a cross between an Andrea del Sarto and a Fra Bartolomeo.

But while that sort of Apollonian perfection is a hallmark of the creative imagination as it evolved in Florence from Giotto onwards, the path was not necessarily always so straight and so narrow. There are abundant examples—the late works of Donatello come to mind—where tempers flare and sparks fly; almost nothing is in the right place. Pontormo is another famously "agitated" Florentine. An early encounter with Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling undoubtedly provoked this angst—a predictable result experienced by many, but none with more unsettling effects than Rosso Fiorentino, Pontormo's close contemporary. Last year, these two artists shared the grand stage of Palazzo Strozzi in Florence in an epochal exhibition that was reviewed in these pages.

A suitable "prequel" to that show would have been the pairing of two slightly earlier and lesser-known eccentrics at work in Florence at the turn of the sixteenth century—Piero di Cosimo (1462–1522) and Filippino Lippi (1457–1504). Both artists shared a gift for telling stories in a tense, unorthodox—today we would say "edgy"—visual language: the first (Piero) by juxtaposing vivid, saturated colors, the other (Filippino) by brilliant, nervous draftsmanship—a pairing that, in truth, is based more on temperament than on style. Had this second, imagined exhibition been mounted, the two shows would have given the great Italian art critic and scholar Roberto Longhi an opportunity to illuminate, with his matchless insight and wit, that which he most prized in any artist or school: inventiveness, or the ability to develop new and occasionally shocking visual twists for familiar figurative devices. It's the reason he so often disparaged Florentine artists, calling them "small-minded drawing teachers" while praising the quirky fabulists of the Ferrarese school, devoting to the rediscovery of that remarkable fifteenth-century phenomenon one of the most original and significant art-history studies ever published.

A current exhibition has, alas, Piero di Cosimo standing alone without the presence of Filippino Lippi to act as an equally eccentric

foil.[1] Absent as well is Piero's teacher Cosimo Rosselli, a thoroughly competent but uninteresting figure, significant enough, however, for the younger artist to have assumed the name. Whatever Piero derived from his master was soon enough subsumed and transformed into a pictorial manner accented with very personal and easily identifiable traits. This is evident from early works such as the rarely seen altarpiece with the *Madonna and Child with Saints Lazarus and Sebastian* (ca. 1480–1485) from the village of Montevettolini. The execution of this work must have coincided almost exactly with the arrival in Florence from Flanders in 1483 of the *Adoration of the Shepherds* (ca. 1475), the so-called "Portinari Altarpiece" by Hugo Van der Goes. It is an oft-repeated truism that the influence on Florentine painting of this monumental work (now in the Uffizi) was profound, particularly in two respects: the representation of landscape in an expansive, truly panoramic and atmospheric way, and the technique of working with oils (rather than the traditional egg tempera) to obtain dense and richly transparent colors that, given their longer drying cycles, could easily be fused in the newfound effect of *sfumato*. No Florentine artist was quicker or more enthusiastic to learn from Hugo's altarpiece than Piero di Cosimo.

By the late 1480s, when Piero completed one of his most significant and impressive works, *The Visitation*, now at the National Gallery in Washington, the colors have the vibrancy and saturation that only the linseed oil medium can impart. The expansive landscape in which the scene is set is a minutely observed and realistically rendered microcosm teeming with anecdotal events in the human as well as the natural realms. Were it not for the monumental presence of the four protagonists in the foreground, the environment surrounding them would have a positively "northern" character, although not as "naturalistically" as Van der Goes might have depicted it. Here, in fact, Piero mischievously inserts an array of curious and even baffling details. Famously noted by the artist/chronicler Vasari are the three polished golden spheres at the feet of St. Nicholas, a playful *tour de force* that the writer sees as a sure sign of the peculiar bent of Piero's personality. Vasari goes to unusual lengths to list a long litany of these odd habits and "lifestyle" choices, and in the process depicts a rather endearing Renaissance proto-hippy.

Whatever counter-cultural inclinations Piero di Cosimo may have manifested, he nonetheless enjoyed the patronage of a number of prominent and wealthy Florentine families, the del Pugliese and Vespucci among them. Oddly, the Medici never became clients, perhaps fearing Piero's growing reputation as a bit of a loose cannon. While he produced for his patrons a steady stream of painted images that served the demands of their private as well as public piety, he also decorated some of their more intimate domestic spaces with flamboyantly pagan themes. These *spalliere* were generally large panels fitted into furniture such as chests, sideboards, or beds, and they might have been organized by narrative episodes. Such paintings were only loosely bound by the thematic content of their subjects and, as a result, the artist had far greater freedom to invent and improvise. Piero di Cosimo's talents found their fullest expression in such works and they remain his most lasting singular achievement.

In the nineteenth century, the allure of their brightly colored and exuberant pagan images made these startling panels—most still in Florentine homes at the time—particularly appealing to English collectors. Only one is still at rest in its native city (in the Uffizi), and it commands attention as the exhibition's essential masterwork, for in the *Liberation of Andromeda* (ca. 1510–1513) Piero displays the full breadth of his talents: in narrative coherence, coloristic bravura, landscape rendering, and figural depiction. The expansive horizontal picture plane embraces a large watery bay marked at its far end by rocky outcroppings. Ovid's timeless fable unfolds in a circular foreground pattern punctuated by groups

1 "Piero di Cosimo: The Poetry of Painting in Renaissance Florence" opened at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., on February 1 and remains on view through May 3, 2015.

of figures representing different moments in the story. At center stage, about to be dealt his comeuppance by Perseus hovering above, the fearsome sea-monster is rising out of the bay. With colorful and feathery appendages flaying, this Renaissance Godzilla is far more fanciful and elegant than his modern B-movie incarnation, and, as in both, the fear factor is entirely negligible.

Three other pairs of mythological decorative cycles have been reunited for this exhibition and are seen together for the first time since their dispersal at various points during the last two centuries. Seen together with the magisterial *Liberation of Andromeda*, they give a full, but not complete, account of Piero di Cosimo's inventive and high-flying imagination. Unfortunately missing are the two narrow, horizontal *spalliere* depicting *The Death of Procris* (1495, London, National Gallery) and *Venus, Cupid, and Mars* (1490, Staatliche Museen, Berlin) that are truly arresting not only for their unusual format but also for the simplicity with which the two or three large figures sprawl on the ground before us in uninhibited nudity. One wonders how these astonishingly pagan images could have been conceived, or even survived, while the firebrand religious reformer Savonarola held the city in thrall with his moral fulminations.

Although Piero is not remembered as a portraitist, one example of this genre would suffice to assure his fame and is fortunately included. It is the double *Portrait of the Architect Giuliano da San Gallo* and (his father) *Francesco Giamberti* (1482–1485, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam). The two men are shown in a reduced bust format, facing each other against an open landscape background. The eye is forcefully drawn inward beyond a fictive parapet to the space they occupy and is instantly aware of their corporeal *presence.* The panels have always been regarded as pinnacles of Italian Renaissance portraiture despite a very deliberate effort by Piero to vie with the likes of Memling and Van der Goes in achieving a crystalline—Flemish—luminosity of surface, an effort that fully succeeds.

Having concentrated exclusively on Piero, the exhibition may lack the contextual comparisons that would have helped to define the artist's place within the larger panorama of Florentine Renaissance painting. But it is, perhaps, not too dear a price to pay for a totally unobstructed view of this singularly imaginative and very independent creative spirit.

Forthcoming in *The New Criterion*:

On the death of Caesar *by Roger Kimball*
Ovid's love and notoriety *by Sarah Ruden*
A new look at Bellow *by Carl Rollyson*
Young Chekhov *by Anthony Daniels*
The letters of Henry James *by Bruce Bawer*
William Styron's nonfiction *by Peter Tonguette*

Plains Indians at the Met

by Karen Wilkin

Plains Indians have had a bad time. Nineteenth-century expansion drove them from the lands they had lived and roamed freely on for thousands of years. The American government confined them to reservations. A campaign of "assimilation" removed Native American children from their families for schooling. Pop culture has been equally cruel. For decades, Plains Indians were the designated enemy in Westerns, characterized as fearless "savages" who galloped out of nowhere to threaten peaceful settlers and heroic cowboys. Their ceremonial garments have been debased as children's Halloween costumes and the props of sports teams that appropriated tribal names and images. And much, much more. Even in today's more enlightened times, the culture of the nomadic peoples of the American West is misunderstood. We all can call up images, partly imprinted on us by the movies, of fierce equestrian warriors, buffalo hunters, beaded moccasins, feather headdresses, decorated tobacco pipes, and the like. But as the absorbing, enlightening exhibition "The Plains Indians: Artists of Earth and Sky" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art makes clear, the history of the peoples of the Great Plains is infinitely longer, more complex, and more enduring than our mental short-hand suggests, and the objects and artifacts they produced over the centuries far subtler and richer.[1]

Our collective conception of the athletic American Indian as a warrior and buffalo hunter, mounted on horseback, fighting settlers and other tribes, is not only a stereotype, but, it turns out, also a stereotype that applies only to the eighteenth and part of the nineteenth centuries, a small fragment—less than two hundred years—of a complicated history stretching back thousands of years. The horses that we inevitably associate with Plains Indians did not arrive in North America until Spanish explorers arrived in the mid-sixteenth century and met the hunter-gatherers of the Southern Plain. By the eighteenth century, horses were an essential part of the Plains Indian way of life; rather like cars after World War II, they were both utilitarian and signs of status, used for transportation, hunting, and battle. Horses changed everything. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Plains Indians prospered. Hunting buffalo on horseback was far more effective than stalking the vast herds on foot, while moving domestic goods with horses was infinitely easier than with dogs; people were better fed, tipis got larger. Farming peoples abandoned their settlements and joined the hunting culture. Plains Indians prospered, too, because of trade with the growing numbers of Europeans. In addition to the all-important horses they had first acquired from early arrivals in North America, they now also negotiated for guns, glass beads, woolen cloth, metal ornaments and tools, needles, knives, and more. The result was, we are told, an era of "unprecedented

1 "The Plains Indians: Artists of Earth and Sky" opened at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, on March 9 and remains on view through May 10, 2015.

mobility, wealth, and power." But contact with Europeans also brought disease, alcohol, and competition for land that the Indians had always occupied, without hindrance, while the ability to kill more buffalo more efficiently, with guns from horseback, steadily depleted the once-inexhaustible herds. By the end of the nineteenth century, millions of buffalo had been reduced to about a thousand, threatening the animals with extinction; epidemics of smallpox, measles, and the like had largely devastated the native population; a policy of settling nomadic peoples on reservations, while waging war and imprisoning those who resisted, did the rest. A way of life had ended.

The exhibition "The Plains Indians: Artists of Earth and Sky," organized by the Musée du quai Branly, Paris, in collaboration with the Metropolitan, and in partnership with the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, is significant in two ways: it is full of visually absorbing material, and it corrects our misconceptions. The exhibit presents vivid and, often, aesthetically dazzling evidence not of a vanished, albeit fascinating, culture, but of a remarkably persistent one that managed to adapt to radically changing conditions and endure, despite those radical changes, from prehistory to the present. As installed at the Met, the show is (loosely) divided into chronological sections devoted to key periods in this long history: "Ancient Peoples;" "Life on the Great Plains, 1700–1820;" "Cultural Florescence, 1829–1860;" "Death of the Buffalo, 1869–1880;" "Islands of Former Ancestral Homelands, 1880–1940;" "Lives Coming Together and Apart, 1910–1965;" "Artistic Revival in Contemporary Life, 1965–2013." Our understanding and appreciation, both for the material on view and the people who produced it, are greatly enlarged.

"Ancient Peoples" begins with a carved stone Human Effigy Pipe, about six inches tall, made 100 BC–AD 100 by the Adena or Hopewell people in what is now Ohio. It is assumed, given what is known about tobacco smoking as part of ritual in traditional Indian life, along with the details of the figure's hairstyle, ornaments, and feather bustle, that the figure is symbolic and that the pipe is a ceremonial object, but here, as with virtually all the oldest objects in the exhibition, there are no written records to corroborate these informed speculations. What's striking is how much the vertical man, with his stylized, flattened features and compressed proportions, recalls Meso-American pre-Columbian figures. So does another Human Effigy Pipe, depicting "The Hero Redhorn or Morningstar," 1100–1200, from Oklahoma. Seated cross-legged, hands on his knees, the blunt-featured figure with his elaborate headpiece, ear-discs, and heavy braid has obvious differences from Meso-American sculptures, but the overtones of similarity are palpable. Other early objects, dated between 1400 and 1700, hint at the tradition of carving pictographs on stone and of mask-making in highly abstracted ways. A few buffalo effigies from this early period, carved out of wood and stone, their purpose only guessed at, attest to the artists' ability to distill acute observations into economical forms.

The sections "Life on the Great Plains, 1700–1820" and "Cultural Florescence, 1820–1860" include many of the most spectacular objects in the exhibition: painted hides, shields, decorated clothing, storage bags, ceremonial pipes, elaborate headdresses, and other treasures, including an utterly delightful, wonderfully simple wooden feast bowl (ca. 1800) from Nebraska; when inverted, as it is displayed, this useful object becomes the portrait of a portly beaver with neat ears and a stubby tail. The painted hides, worn as robes, are extraordinary. The ripples created by pegging out the skin in the tanning process become decorative edges, subtly enhancing the internal borders and the delicate drawing in the center of the hide, which presents everything from stylized, economically rendered but eminently identifiable figures to symbolic "abstractions," to marvelous, surprisingly individualized horses. In some, the complex geometric patterns are the main event—the province of women, we learn. (Men did the representational elements). There are impressive items of clothing decorated with drawing, geometric quill work, and, over time, as more Europeans frequented the Great Plains,

with glass beads, silk embroidery, and metal decorations obtained by trading. (Embroidery, whether with quills, beads, or silk, was done by women.) Graphic evidence of changing conditions is provided by an elkskin man's coat (ca. 1840), with elaborate quill work, some of it vaguely floral, and fringe; unlike traditional leather garments, which retain much of the shape of the animal hide from which they were made, the cut of this garment is more or less that of an eighteenth-century gentleman's riding coat.

Many of the oldest (and most compelling) painted-hide robes, headdresses, and other items in the early sections of the exhibition come from European collections, including that of the Musée du quai Branly. Only one of the four eighteenth-century hide robes on display comes from an American museum. Apparently, the robes were originally collected by French missionaries and sent back to France, where they have remained ever since; some of them have not been on this side of the Atlantic since the missionaries obtained them from the people they were trying to convert. A splendid woman's painted "buffalo robe" (ca. 1830) with geometric designs supposedly symbolizing a buffalo's internal organs was acquired by the indefatigable traveler and collector of exotica Prince Maximilian zu Wied-Neuwied on an expedition from Boston to "Indian territory" across the Great Plains. This handsome object, collected in 1832–4, is now in the collection of the State Museum of Ethnology, Stuttgart. Only later, it seems, did Americans begin to value the artifacts of their native populations.

The sections of the exhibition dealing with the early part of the nineteenth-century feature a wealth of inventively decorated men's and women's garments, moccasins, bags, and other objects, including a magnificent horse mask, that combine traditional materials, such as leather, porcupine quills, and feathers, with glass beads, silver buttons, and wool cloth obtained by trading. Elegantly painted storage bags, elaborately carved and decorated tobacco pipes, war axes, and the like bear witness to what we have learned about the first part of the nineteenth century as a time of prosperity and cultural flowering, despite pressure from American expansion, the effects of disease, and inter-tribal warfare.

There are equally splendid works in the later sections of the installation devoted, roughly, to the years 1860–1910, even though the period was marked by the precipitous decline of the buffalo, brutal warfare, epidemics, and the confinement of the Indian population to reservations. The carved heads and animals on the ceremonial pipes are as lively and sharply observed as ever; the designs on clothing and other accoutrements, mostly rendered in glass beads and metal ornaments, are still bold and elegantly rendered, and the quality of the beadwork is often exceptionally high. There are beautiful, lavishly decorated cradleboards, moccasins, and tobacco bags. But we see the imagery in the decorations change. Along with motifs we have come to recognize from the early exhibits, American flags crop up in unexpected places: flanked by roosters on a pair of elaborately beaded gauntlets made about 1890 in North or South Dakota and repeated many times on a nifty horse mask designed to cover both head and neck, made about 1900 in the same region. (A horse mask, we learn, was neither mere decoration nor a sign of status, but conveyed spiritual power.) After government agents banned the Sun Dance and other indigenous practices, Plains Indians turned the holidays they were permitted to celebrate, particularly the Fourth of July, into occasions for versions of the rituals and social gatherings that were once associated with their own ceremonies—hence the flags and the occasional eagle.

Among the most poignant works from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are garments and objects associated with the Ghost Dance, a new religion, led by a Paiute prophet, around 1889–1890, that promised a return to the Plains Indians' former way of life, on a regenerated earth with abundant buffalo. Other changing beliefs are attested to by a ceremonial rattle, made about 1900, used by the adherents of the Native American Church, with an incised portrait of Jesus as decoration. Equally touching is a beautifully beaded valise with mounted warriors in feather headdresses,

women, and a deer on one side, and buffalo hunters on horseback on the other. Inscribed "1903" and "Josephine Gates," the piece, which documents the family of the maker's participation in an important battle during the Sioux Uprising, in 1863, was presented to Miss Gates by her mother, the accomplished artist who created the valise, upon her graduation from Carlisle Indian School in 1909.

A small section of the exhibition is given over to what are termed "Plains Indian graphic arts," otherwise known as drawings on paper. Artists who painted the people of the Great Plains early in the nineteenth century, such as George Catlin and Karl Bodner (who accompanied Prince Maxmilian), apparently attracted considerable interest and shared their materials with some of their subjects. A tradition of painting on tanned-hide tipis and robes, usually to record exploits and important events in tribal history, obviously predated the arrival of these artists, but working as they did, on paper, was something new. From about 1860 to 1900, with greatly increased contact with traders and settlers, Plains Indian men began commemorating the history of battles and other feats on paper, using pencil, colored pencil, watercolor, and ink, often on the pages of account books—ledgers—which is why these works are usually termed "ledger drawings." Some of these vigorous, expressive images were done by men imprisoned in the eastern United States in the 1870s, as records of a way of life they had lost and, sometimes, as works made for sale outside the prison. Whatever their origins, whatever their medium, the ledger drawings are, almost without exception, astonishing works of art, at once informative, inventive, and deeply expressive. The mounts are as individualized as the warriors who ride them—sometimes more so—and at their best, they have the clarity, simplification, and truthfulness of prehistoric wall paintings of horses. (The only other object in the show that comes close is a wooden effigy of a lean, long-necked horse at full gallop, with a horsehair tail and rawhide reins, a memorial to a beloved mount killed in battle, carved about 1880 in North or South Dakota.) The selection of ledger drawings at the Met is relatively small, if choice, but, in compensation, there are interactive video screens that allow us to turn the pages of two famous books.

The section titled "Lives Coming Together and Apart, 1910–1965" explores the complex, changing perceptions of "the Indian" before, during, and after World Wars I and II—perceptions colored by Wild West shows, adventure novels, and movies. Some artifacts demonstrate the coexistence of past and present, such as an elegant pair of women's lace-up, mid-heel shoes, covered with fine beadwork, made about 1920 by a Lakota artist in the Dakotas. More puzzling is a playful, charming appliqué quilt, made about 1915 in Nebraska or South Dakota, with rows of horses, equestrian figures, tipis, hunters, dogs, deer, birds, a giant flower surrounded by giant insects—and a kangaroo. By contrast, a sumptuous eagle feather headdress, with long, trailing side pieces, made about 1925 by Lakota artists, appears to be a perfect example of a surviving tradition. Yet despite its fidelity to time-honored techniques and materials, the headdress was made when such ceremonial feather bonnets were detached both from their former meaning and the regions where they were originally used, to become generic symbols of "Indianness" adopted by tribal leaders from other parts of the country and bestowed on foreign dignitaries.

The contemporary section of the exhibition at the Met applauds the continuity of Plains Indian culture and signals modern day appreciation of the heirs of that legacy. Finely crafted objects made with traditional techniques are exhibited along with updated, slightly ironic versions, plus photographs, videos, and works by such figures as the artist/activist Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, as evidence of the persistence of creativity among the descendants of Plains Indians. We can ignore the obvious questions about the differences between functional works made within a living culture and works made today as art when we notice an elaborate feather bustle, made about 1973. It's not very different from the one worn by the two-thousand-year-old figure with which the exhibition begins.

Exhibition notes

"Wifredo Lam: Imagining New Worlds"
High Museum of Art, Atlanta.
February 14–May 24, 2015

"I wanted with all my heart to paint the drama of my country," Wifredo Lam (1902–1982) famously said, "but by thoroughly expressing the Negro spirit, the beauty of the plastic arts of the blacks. In this way I would act as a Trojan horse that would spew forth hallucinating figures with the power to surprise, to disturb the dreams of the exploiters."

This is a fittingly surreal way for Cuba's original surrealist to describe his intentions on returning home in 1941 after an absence of seventeen years, having completed his apprenticeship among the likes of Picasso, Matisse, André Bréton, and Claude Lévi-Strauss in Madrid, Paris, and Marseille. In Cuba, Lam encountered once again the sensory overload of the tropics; he also became reacquainted with the lingering racism and colonialist attitudes of Caribbean culture. Lam's "hallucinating figures," which began appearing in his work in the 1940s, not only reinvigorated aspects of his African-Spanish-Chinese ancestry, but also reimagined what he had absorbed of cubism, surrealism, leftist ideologies, and emerging literary and political efforts such as Aimé Césaire's Négritude movement. Later in his life and especially after his death, Lam was enthusiastically adopted by the postcolonialist theorists. This is not surprising—being a mixed-race artist inspired by a growing ethnic awareness in a society of cultural and racial injustice makes Lam irresistible to the academy. The good news is that Lam carries his claims lightly, never allowing his interest in the cultural and political currents of his time to overshadow the poetic voice that he cultivated across his long and productive career.

Born to a Chinese father (who was eighty-four years old at the time of his son's birth) and a mother of African-Spanish descent, Wilfredo (he later dropped the "l") Óscar de la Concepción Lam y Castilla left Cuba in 1923 to study art in Madrid. The shadowy city scene of *Plaza de Segovia, Madrid* (1923) and the complex still life of *Bodegón, II* (1927) demonstrate a precocious facility with light, form, and composition. His extraordinary pencil portraits of two Spanish peasants, *Campesino* (1926) and *Campesina Castellana* (1927), show that Lam had become a psychologically astute artist as well as an excellent draftsman. While in Spain, Lam frequently earned extra money painting portraits: *[Retrato de Adel Bina]* (1933) is a delicate, Laurencin-like portrait of a friend, while *Untitled* (1931), of a blue-eyed beauty is accomplished but overly sentimentalized. Lam's early excursions through magical realism may be best understood as anguished expressions of the grief he felt over losing both his wife and his son to tuberculosis in 1931.

In 1936, Lam began producing propaganda supporting the Republican side during the Spanish Civil War and even participated in the siege of Madrid in 1937. Around this same time, he encountered the art of Picasso and Matisse and visited the African collection at the Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid. The impact of these political, artistic, and ethnic influences would change Lam's work completely.

Lam met Picasso in Paris in 1938—the master musing "you remind me of someone that I knew many years ago . . . me"—and began painting in a style that consciously emulated that of the older artist (they would remain lifelong friends). Lam was also strongly influenced by Matisse, as seen in *La Ventana, I* (1935) and *[Retrato de la Señora García de Castro, II]* (1937), both characterized by a flat picture plane, vivid colors, heavy black outlines, and simplied forms. Acting on Picasso's encouragement to explore his interest in African motifs, Lam began a series of works that featured a woman with a mask-like face and a body abstracted to geometric volumes. He worked through this motif in the late 1930s in a somewhat repetitive fashion, but *Nature morte [La Table blanche]* (1939) has an unexpected freshness, due perhaps to stepping out from under the master's shadow.

By 1941, Lam had become fully integrated into the surrealist circle, joining André Bréton, Max Ernst, and a host of others as they escaped from Paris for Marseille. The pencil and ink drawings from Lam's *Carnets de Marseille* seamlessly integrate School of Paris, Afri-

can art, and surrealism. On first glance, these delicate drawings seem to possess a Klee-like charm, but the distended human figures and the screaming, staring faces show Lam already in touch with themes he would expand on fully in a few short years.

When the *Capitaine Paul Lemerle* sailed from Marseille in 1941, its passengers included Lam, Bréton, and some 300 French intellectuals bound for Martinique. Having already participated in political action in Spain and experienced Nazi rule in France, Lam returned to Cuba sensitized to the abuses of autocracy. "I went to Europe to escape from my father, the symbol of the 'father' [establishment]. . . . My return to Cuba meant, above all, a great stimulation to my imagination, as well as the exteriorization of my world."

What is commonly referred to as Lam's hybrid style forms the core of this retrospective. Neither hybridization nor syncretism really describes what Lam began painting in the 1940s. It is true that his work from this time carries echoes of surrealism in the sense of its juxtapositions and cacophony, cubism in its emphasis on fragmentation, and magical realism in its deadpan combinations of impish African religious deities, tropical natural motifs, and mythical creatures like the *femme-cheval* (horse-woman). And it is true that Lam did not shy away from depicting Christian figures intermingled with Santería *orishas* (Yoruban spirits or saints) or rendering classical figures as anthropomorphs. The current running through all of Lam's art is his ineluctable sense of place.

Regrettably, his 1943 masterpiece *La Jungla*, a gouache on paper, is too delicate to travel, but *Le Sombre Malembo, Dieu du carrefour* from the same year is just as potent. Malembo (in present-day Angola) refers to the coastal port from which slave ships departed for the middle passage. A crossroads in a historical sense, the port and its ships also put in motion a cultural transfer in which African artforms and practices migrated to the Caribbean where they were further transformed by other influences such as Catholicism, capitalism, and, later, secular Enlightenment ideas. Although Lam's reference to the slave trade is clear, the more compelling impression is a syncretic one, in which the artist reinterprets a group of forbidding *orishas* against a variegated background of sinister greens, almost like a stained glass window, an artform, it will be remembered, that originated as a medium for Christian faith and instruction.

Lam's use of a mixed-media stain technique proved one of his richest explorations. Applying thinned pigment to unprimed canvas created a Neo-Impressionistic effect that opened up his color-clogged style to luminosity and even greater ambiguity. *L'Annonciation* (1944) blends Christian iconography with that of winged Santería spirits, including his favorite, the impish Elegguá. As Claude Cernuschi points out in his catalogue essay, works such as this typify Lam's eclecticism and his refusal to allow polemics or ideologies to overtake his work: "The tension is undeniable: on the one hand, the artist professes a belief in the necessity for art to convey a social message, as well as his confidence in his work's ability to meet this requirement; on the other, the necessity to give free rein to his imagination, irrespective of the audience's expectations."

The complex implications of Lam's *femme-cheval* also defy easy interpretation. Uniting the natural, the supernatural, and the human, the *femme-cheval* echoes her mythical opposite, the Minotaur, as well as the Santería symbol of a devotee possessed and "ridden" by an *orisha*. Nor can we discount the ambiguous role of women in Cuba's patriarchal society; at the same time, women practitioners of Santería (such as Lam's godmother) and other African religions like Palo Monte or Voodoo held unexpected power. Lam's remarkable oil on canvas *Femme-Cheval* (1948) and the eleven variations in the chalk on paper *Femmes-Cheval* (1953) indicate that while the artist was aware of the psychological, spiritual, and mythical connotations of the *femme-cheval*, he was more interested in probing what he called its "poetic excitation."

After World War II, Lam divided his time between Havana, Paris, and New York. Not surprisingly, his exposure to Abstract Expressionism resulted in his own experiment in that style, *Untitled* (1958), an intriguing but

unsatisfying foray into an idiom that seems antithetical to his essentially romantic temperament. With *Près des Îles Vierges* (1959) and *Grande Composition* (1960), Lam returns to his fruitful exploration of what Roberto Goizueta refers to as the "numinous," the elusive, yet consoling "wellspring of all authentic life, the very character of all created existence." *À la fin de la nuit [Le Lever du jour]* (1969) with its glowing, spiky superstructure against a dark, neutral background is not exactly buoyant but exudes a kind of low-key levity rarely seen in Lam's work.

The engravings on view are monochromatic miniatures of immense skill, filled with bizarre creatures and unsettling sexuality—clearly, Lam made time for studying Hieronymus Bosch while in Europe. The oil stain technique he perfected in the 1940s is adapted to tremendous effect in etching and aquatint works such as *connaître, dit-il* and *insolites bâtisseurs* (both 1969, the latter with not one but two *femmes-cheval*).

Moving from the conservative traditions of Cuba to the openness of Europe, especially the affirming company of the surrealists, not to mention the encouragement of Picasso and Bréton, allowed Lam to return to Cuba with inner resources that could not be stifled by social or political constraints. The "new worlds" that Lam imagined, it turns out, resist the corrosiveness of postmodern skepticism and find instead a different truth, one that is disclosed only gradually, if at all. "I knew I was running the risk of not being understood either by the man in the street or by the others," Lam once said. "But a true picture has the power to set the imagination to work even if it takes time."

—Leann Davis Alspaugh

"The Critique of Reason:
Romantic Art, 1760–1860"
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven.
March 6–July 26, 2015

"Romanticism is like a phantom," Prince Pyotr Vyazemsky complained in 1824. "Many people believe in it; there is a conviction that it exists, but where are its distinctive features; how can it be defined?" Two decades later, Baudelaire identified only its features: Romanticism is found "neither in choice of subjects nor in exact truth, but in a way of feeling." The question of definition requires the wider context, the political, scientific, and perceptual revolutions of John Stuart Mill's "Age of Change." As Richard Holmes showed in *The Age of Wonder* (2008), the irrationalist was also the man of science. The dandy who sniffed the daffodil might dissect it in paint for a naturalist's catalogue. The poet who plunged inwards and downwards might, like William Blake, surface with a business plan for color printing. Reason and the passions, order and disarray, Enlightenment and Romanticism: the dialectic and outcome summarized in the title of Jacques Barzun's pathbreaking study, *Classic, Romantic, and Modern* (1961).

Modern, though youngest, has aged the worst. Yale's Center for British Art, one of Louis Kahn's last designs, is closed for repairs. Across the road, the Yale Art Gallery, an earlier Kahn design, was restored in 2006. The temporary closure of the British collection has inspired the first collaborative exhibition between the neighbors. The exhibition is not comprehensive: the nearest it comes to German Romanticism are Delacroix's illustrations of 1828 for the first French edition of Goethe's *Faust*. It does, though, juxtapose British and French works in a thematic arrangement that, by sacrificing the distinctive features of chronology and national schools, answers the harder question of definition.

The exhibition's title, "The Critique of Reason," defines Romanticism in Kantian terms: Romanticism as a skeptical self-analysis of Enlightenment forms. The first painting we see is Jacques de Loutherbourg's *Visitor to a Moonlit Churchyard* (1790). Under a cold moon, a young man contemplates a medieval ruin and its detritus of disinterred skulls and a knight's tomb dragged up from the crypt: the facts of mortality and historical perspective are incommensurate to a "way of feeling" that, ever perennial, has become unavoidable. Themed rooms lead from this image of spiritual crisis. The search for new vessels leads to intense engagements with Nature, new visual technologies, and ultimately to scientific systematizing and mass politics.

In the first rooms, medieval Christendom flickers out in Blake's late drawings for *The Divine Comedy* and a darkly lambent *Virgin and Child* (1825). While the grand apocalypses of John Martin show the undoing of a Biblical world, modern *Innerlichkeit* arrives in the weird and private luminosities of Samuel Palmer's *Harvest Moon* (1833) and Jean-Pierre Malet's *Starry Night* (1850–65). In the early 1800s, Lord Granville Leveson-Gower poses for Sir Thomas Lawrence with almost Neoclassical confidence. Thirty years later, Delacroix's *Comte de Mornay* (1837) looks less sure of himself. Another thirty years, and individuality is besieged by the modern style. Carjat's photographs—a sickly and suspicious Baudelaire (1862) and a Victor Hugo (1864) gnarled with shadows—are displayed in Woodburytype, the first process for the accurate reproduction of photographs.

In the last rooms, the dream is ironized by reality. Here, as in the portrait room, the exhibition cleverly mixes British and French paintings with old and new media. Blake's *America* (1793) faces both a cabinet of French propaganda medals from the Revolutionary and Napoleonic periods and also the wounded soldiers and exhausted horse of Géricault's *Retour de Russie* (1818). A harrowingly long wall of Goya's *Disasters of War* (1810–20) faces Ary Scheffer's *Retreat of Napoleon's Army from Russia in 1812* (1826). Delacroix and Daumier's lithographs of urban misery are paired with the grim monochrome of Thomas Annan's photographs of the Glasgow slums. Albumen prints and early photographs accompany David Roberts's watercolors of ancient Egypt, as well as lithographs of contemporary North Africans by Géricault and Delacroix, and Richard Parkes Bonington's *Seated Turk* (1826), an oil portrait painted in Delacroix's studio and exhibited at a fundraiser for Greek independence. Doubling the ambiguities of the political and economic revolutions of the age, Stubbs's *Zebra* (1763) and John Frederick Lewis's fine *Study of a Lioness* (1824) stand for scientific naturalism, Stubbs's *Lion Attacking a Horse* (1770) for the moral that late Romantics called Darwinian: *On the Origin of Species*, published in 1859, is the exhibition's *terminus ad quem*. To anthropomorphize Nature is to naturalize Man. The central rooms belong to landscapes. Gainsborough's *Mountain Valley with Rustic Figures* (1773–7) offers a receding glimpse of Arcadia, but everywhere else Nature is the canvas of human history. The shepherds in Constable's storm-wracked *Hadleigh Castle* (1829) cower before the wind, not Arcadians but refugees. Nature and time have eroded the rock of the cliffs and the stones of the castle; nearby, similar disintegration afflicts Thomas Girtin's *Jedburgh Abbey* (1800) and Turner's *St. Augustine's Gate at Canterbury* (1793). In Turner's *Staffa, Fingal's Cave* (1811–2), ancient volcanic grandeur returns as grotesque modern grandeur: the smokestack of a tourist steamer smears the scene in soot. In the nocturnal inferno of Turner's *Limekiln at Coalbrookdale* (1793) and Joseph Wright of Derby's *Cottage on Fire at Night* (1785–93), the fantastical becomes natural and the hellish earthly. To watch your cottage burn down in the darkness: the poor man's sublime.

Like Tom Wolfe at an Acid Test, the Romantics were in Nature, but not of it. The critical sense was always present: "The Critique of Reason" journeys like Wordsworth's Newton, "through strange seas of Thought, alone"—but not without a compass. Blake equipped his *Newton* with a compass, the instrument of rational tyranny, but Blake was a Manichean. For Kant, the familiar antinomies were, like the merging of rock and smoke in Turner's *Staffa*, part of a greater unity. The continuity between Neoclassical and Romantic is clearer in sculpture and words than in painting. Byron was an eighteenth-century libertine who became a nineteenth-century celebrity. Kant was a product of the late Enlightenment, and Hegel's spiritualized, mystical history advances by the Enlightenment progress of stages. And, as Ruth Guilding shows in her recent book, *Owning the Past*, the seam between the ages of Enlightenment and Romanticism was smoother still in marble.

Guilding has written a superb history of "Marble Mania" and the British collectors who enjoyed succumbing to it. In the Romantic period, marble retained its "distinctive" value as the material of ancient emperors and

modern tycoons, but its "definition" changed to reflect a different "way of feeling." In 1805, the British Museum bought Charles Townley's Roman marbles as the centerpiece of its Classical collection. The Museum redefined Townley's marbles by "scientific" analysis, and divided them into groups for display: a private collection had become a public artifact of Neoclassical ideals. But within a few years, Lord Elgin's Parthenon sculptures became "the lodestar of genuine Greek workmanship" and of Romantic Philhellenism. Parts of Townley's once-admired collection were banished to a windowless basement room.

Yet these changes did not "unweave the rainbow" like Blake's Newton. Instead, their deeper, more "scientific" understanding of antique sculpture enriched the Romantic imagination. When Haydon took Keats to see the Elgin Marbles, Keats felt a "most dizzy pain" from the friction of two incompatible yet integral perceptions. An ecstatic dream of "Grecian grandeur" mingled with a quantified sense of "the rude/ Wasting of old Time." Like the young man in Loutherbourg's *Visitor to a Moonlit Churchyard*, Keats had experienced a Romantic critique of reason.

—*Dominic Green*

Gallery chronicle
by James Panero

If the genealogy of modern art contains both dominant and recessive traits, the expression of the latter can be rare and rewarding. Such was the case for Pattern and Decoration, a movement of the 1970s. Against the predominant, reductivist urge of Minimalism and Pop, P&D looked to the broader traditions of ornament, craft, and cross-cultural motif. It also engaged the legacy of "women's work" with an interest in textile, quilting, and other domestic arts.

The dynamic out of which P&D emerged shares much with our cultural landscape today. This goes to explain why we see many of our most enriching artists again exploring decorative themes. As Minimalism and Pop have merged into a hybrid, factory-made consumable to dominate the auctions and art fairs, an alternative, underground scene has developed around work that is often small, hand-made, and dedicated to a devotional and craft-like repetition.

Now on view at 1285 Avenue of the Americas Art Gallery, otherwise known as the lobby of the UBS building on 52nd and Sixth, the curator Jason Andrew of the Bushwick nonprofit Norte Maar has assembled thirty artists offering many of the best examples of these developments in "between a place and candy: new works in pattern + repetition + motif."[1]

Andrew's title comes from a sentence by Gertrude Stein: "In between a place and candy is a narrow foot-path that shows more mounting than anything, so much really that a calling meaning a bolster measured a whole thing with that." In other words, *pace* Stein, don't expect an easy explanation as to what this title means.

"Words to Stein were used like elements of collage," Andrew said to me, "fragments of meaning that when pieced together sang songs, offered impressions, and relayed ideas. I am a huge fan of Stein's poetry and relate much of my curatorial approach to her early modernist view—finding a theme and then selecting artists that drive the theme, enhanced by their diverse approaches."

The title of this exhibition is a puzzle, which may just be the point. Repetition can be beautiful, but it can also be illogical, tedious, and obsessive. The representation of a single thing gives us an answer—a spot to focus on. The repetition of many things poses a question. Why so many when one will do? In this questioning, we may find the comfort of pattern. Lost in the beauty of repetition, we drop the urge to understand.

There is no set beginning or end to the UBS show, which has evolved from an exhibition Andrew put together a year ago at the Matteawan Gallery in Beacon, New York. You can enter from anywhere in the building's lobby, and in fact the rows of walls in this modernist space add their own pattern to the program, which Andrew has considered as

1 "between a place and candy: new works in pattern + repetition + motif" opened at 1285 Avenue of the Americas Art Gallery, New York, on March 16 and remains on view through June 12, 2015.

you look down one row to the next. And a word needs to be said about this building's receptiveness to smart exhibition programing. Andrew's exhibition "To be a Lady," reviewed in this column in November 2012, took place here, and the building has a long history of artistic association through the UBS Art Collection. If every midtown office building gave their public space over to arts programing, such corporate "apartment galleries" could provide herd-immunity to the further spread of MOMA-nucleosis.

One place to start when entering the current show is *Hanging Gardens Series (By the Sea)* (2011–2). This eight-foot-tall gouache and colored pencil on paper by Robert Zakanitch, who was one of the leading artists of Pattern and Decoration, is a new, standout piece and a connection to that earlier movement. With its height, the large lower register is the first to come into focus—an assembly of red dots contained in pulsating blue bursts. Their arrangement has, one might say, an irregular regularity. Shapes are organic and aqueous. Some pick up a yellow halo. Others either turn into stalks of bluebell flowers or cover them over. Looking up, we see that the top of the work contains stylized white swirls. The all-over composition resembles a ceremonial illustration, but the reference is not immediately clear. Are those waves on top washing over blue sea-life, or clouds watering a flowery field? Are the blue shapes water droplets raining down from above, or flowers from below turning up? The exact meaning matters less than the comforting feel conveyed through the patterns.

Natural imagery, flowering patterns, and the channeling of traditional craft recur throughout the exhibition. In *Medium* (2015), Colin Thomson layers thick lines in meso-American forms. In *Bacio* (2015), Mary Judge references Renaissance tile-work in a pattern of circles and squares that becomes petals of blue and white shimmering between figure and ground. In *Fly-by* (1995–2015), Hermine Ford used oil on shaped panel to recall archeological fragments, in particular the pottery sherds and painted ceramics of Italy.

Textile work is also prevalent and often deployed in innovative ways, reflecting a renewed interest in the medium—or what the gallery Outlet Brooklyn recently called "loominosity." Robin Kang, in *Two Birds with Diamonds* (2015), uses hand Jacquard-woven cotton and tinsel to illustrate the patterns of microchips and motherboards. John Silvis, in *Crashcourse VI* (2015), uses thread and felt to depict damaged cars. Tamara Gonzalez, in *sleep beside me* (2015), takes lace and other woven materials as spraypaint stencils. Samantha Bittman uses acrylic on handwoven textile to soften the black-and-white striped moire patterns of hard-edge optical art.

Repetitive, hard-edge abstractions are balanced against the feel of the hand-made. In *Massai (P-158)* (2012), Joan Witek uses black stripes of oil stick with pencil on white canvas to dazzling effect. The same goes for Libby Hartle, whose collage of graphite dashes on paper resembles the wood grain of a herringbone floor. With his crisscrossing lines, Rob de Oude looks to the shapes that emerge in the intersection of patterns. In her devotional small gouaches on wood panels, Lori Ellison finds the forms that emerge from a pattern's hand-drawn idiosyncrasies.

Kerry Law, finally, has the last word on Pop seriality. In *Empire State Building Series* (2013–5), Law depicts the spire on the Empire State Building on foot-square canvases, just as he sees it in the distance on different evenings from his studio in Ridgewood, Queens. I was taken with this series when I caught it at Storefront Bushwick some years ago. The work references "Empire," Warhol's tedious eight-hour 1964 film of the building, as well as those ubiquitous silkscreens, but here the hand has been restored to the icon. Law finds infinite nuance in the scene's changing light and atmosphere, which is often obscured by clouds, all perfectly rendered in the subtleties of paint. The series evokes the passage of time as well as the artist's personal routine, a pattern of looking out the window every evening and capturing what he sees.

Nearby, in the Crown Building, D. Wigmore Fine Art has brought together a comprehen-

sive survey of Tadasuke Kuwayama, the great artist of the circle known to us as Tadasky.[2]

Born in 1935 in Nagoya, Japan, the youngest of eleven children, Tadasky came to New York to paint some fifty years ago and has been at work ever since. As explained by Joe Houston in his informative catalogue essay, Tadasky's father was a prominent builder of Shinto shrines, with designs that were marked by symmetry and spareness. When control of the company went to a sibling, Tadasky was free to explore painting, but he never diverged far from his devotional beginnings. His body of work consists almost exclusively of concentric circles composed in a square canvas, which he says he fully envisions in advance before putting oil to canvas.

To make his paintings, all by hand, Tadasky developed a turntable easel that allows him to sit above his compositions and brace his fine Japanese brushes as the canvases rotate beneath him. What's remarkable is both the precision he can create through this system and the variation he can discover with his circular motif over time. Tadasky describes Josef Albers as an early influence, and it's possible to see this body of work as one great homage to *Homage to the Square*, with equally rewarding results.

D. Wigmore has assembled examples of Tadasky's evolving series through the decades, which he assigns with a letter followed by a number. While the B series from the early 1960s are regular rings of alternating color, the lines of the C series become more multifaceted. In the D series from the later 1960s, Tadasky reduces the color variation but introduces black lines of alternating thickness to produce a gradient, giving his rings a topographical curve. From the E series on, Tadasky has used sprays to produce even finer gradients and textures so his circles come to resemble spheres. Along the way his compositions have become increasingly celestial, so that *M-282 (Black Center with White Rings)* from 2006 resembles a blue star in eclipse or perhaps the iris of a divine eye.

Here, in Tadasky, we can see the results of a career devoted to a single motif. "I have learned that when you polish something over and over, it shines in its own way," he recently explained in an interview with the online magazine *Geoform*. "You are creating your own world. For many years, I have polished the forms that I use to brilliance."

A gallery that has long been devoted to "reductive abstract art" is Minus Space, founded in 2003 by the artists Matthew Deleget and Rossana Martinez. "Breaking Pattern," its current exhibition, features Gabriele Evertz, Anoka Faruqee, Gilbert Hsiao, Douglas Melini, and Michael Scott—five New York-area artists focused around "pattern, optical, and perceptual abstract painting."[3]

In Hsiao's *Dual* (2008), the action in this shaped canvas, something like a skewed lozenge, starts from points on either end. Sharp, symmetrical ripples of white, black, and silver lines radiate to one another, with extra patterns coming forward in the intersections. As they crash together, the effect speaks to the "breaking" of the exhibition's title. Anoka Faruqee similarly runs a large-toothed trowel over sanded-down canvases to produce twisted taffy lines. Douglas Melini layers freehand splatters of acrylic over taped patterns. Gabriele Evertz cuts the luminosity of metallic paint against the shifting values of her vertical and diagonal lines. *Untitled (#98)*, the black and white enamel on aluminum by Michael Scott, carries this breakage the furthest. Using tape with a thinned black medium on a bright white polished surface, Scott lets his moire lines seep and run like an Op Art ruin. Even the recent history of modern art has now entered the pattern book, open for artists to copy and repeat in new ways.

2 "Tadasky: Control and Invention, 1964–2008" opened at D. Wigmore Fine Art, New York, on February 7 and remains on view through April 27, 2015.

3 "Breaking Pattern" opened at Minus Space, Brooklyn, on February 28 and remains on view through April 18, 2015.

Music

New York chronicle

by Jay Nordlinger

James MacMillan, born in 1959, is a Scottish composer of religious conviction. In 2008, he completed his Piano Concerto No. 3, which has a subtitle: "The Mysteries of Light." It was premiered in Minneapolis, with Jean-Yves Thibaudet at the keyboard.

In his own words (as they say in courtroom dramas), MacMillan explains that his concerto "attempts to revive the ancient practice of writing music based on the structure of the Rosary." In 2002, John Paul II introduced the Luminous Mysteries, and "these are the basis of the five sections" of the concerto. MacMillan cautions, however, that the music "is in no way geared towards liturgy," nor is it "devotional in any accepted, traditional sense." Rather, "each image or event becomes the springboard for a subjective reflection . . ."

We're talking, in short, about a piano concerto—though a concerto with an impetus and a plan.

It was performed at the New York Philharmonic, with the original pianist, Thibaudet, serving as soloist. On the podium was another Frenchman, Stéphane Denève. Before giving the downbeat, Denève gave a little lecture about the concerto, with Thibaudet supplying musical examples. The audience was in music-appreciation class. What was in the program notes was repeated on the stage. To my sense, this took the air out of the hall, as such lectures usually do. But other people don't seem to mind.

In his opening movement, MacMillan uses plainchant. He also uses plenty of percussion, in the modern style. There is a touch of jazz, too, which is again modern. Also, there are those familiar magical sounds: bells, chimes, and the like. The pianist had better be a virtuoso, for MacMillan gives him cascades of notes.

The second movement has some dancing that smacks of the British Isles. A reel? A jig? This made me smile a bit, because this second movement is meant to depict, or suggest, the wedding at Cana. There was nothing Israelite about this dancing (to my ears). I also thought I heard some Prokofiev along the way—specifically, the composer's own Piano Concerto No. 3. (Remember, this is MacMillan's third one.)

In later movements, there are more of those magical sounds. There is tinkling, twinkling. I sometimes say that a composer "sprinkles fairy dust" on a work. At times, MacMillan's concerto is cinematic, Disneyesque. The plainchant recurs. There is a fair amount of doodling and noodling. Mainly, in my opinion, this is interesting, and mainly, in my opinion, it all coheres.

Though only twenty-five minutes, the concerto felt a little long to me. Does it have a "heavenly length," as would befit a religious concerto? I'm not sure. I look forward to hearing the concerto again. What is beyond doubt is that James MacMillan is a serious composer who loves music and has important things to say. He does not write frivolously—except when frivolity is called for!—and he writes well.

As for Thibaudet, he played with his usual fluidity and dexterity. Also his attention to color. He used sheet music, which puzzled

me slightly. During the lecture-demonstration, he mentioned that he was performing the concerto for the twenty-seventh time. I often wonder why musicians don't pay living composers the compliment of memorizing their music. But it is not a big issue.

Jamie Barton, a mezzo-soprano from Rome, Georgia, sang a recital in Zankel Hall. She was accompanied by Bradley Moore, an excellent pianist. Their program was varied, to put it mildly. The program had five different sections in five different languages. And, blessedly, there was no theme. There was simply an assortment of music, intelligently chosen and attractively put together. One of the items was a new work—a brand-new work, having its world premiere.

When Barton appeared, the audience gave her a long and loud ovation. They expected something good—and they got it. The evening began with songs by Turina, his *Homenaje a Lope de Vega*. Barton tackled the songs with gusto. She showed a killer chest voice and a free top (i.e., an unhindered upper register). She is obviously someone who enjoys singing and enjoys music. This may seem like nothing—or like something to take for granted—but it counts for a lot.

The lid was way up on the piano, and you would not have wanted to miss Moore. As usual, he was smart and stylish. He has a sense of balance, and a sense of the musical line. His Turina was idiomatic. I believe the late, great Spaniard Alicia de Larrocha would have smiled and approved.

Next came three songs by Chausson. The first, "Le colibri," was slightly labored and unflowing. Now and then in these songs, Barton had trouble sustaining a middle or low note through to the end of a phrase. She kind of ran out of gas. But this was a peccadillo. Barton has generally a plush voice with an edge. As she sang, I was reminded of two older American mezzos, Marilyn Horne and Stephanie Blythe.

To close the first half was a Schubert set. One thing I admire about Barton is that she remembers that the songs are songs—music. She does not get bogged down in words or poetry. She does not intellectualize the music. She sings! One of the songs was the very, very familiar—the iconic—"Gretchen am Spinnrade." Can you hear this song again? You can, from such performers as Barton and Moore. It seemed almost new (and it was interesting to hear it in C minor, rather than its customary D minor). Barton was at her best anytime the music called for plushness and regality.

If she was guilty of anything in this first half, it was a little sameness. A little interpretive or stylistic monotony. But Leontyne Price and other greats have been accused of the same, so Jamie Barton is at a minimum in good company.

The new work, which began the second half, is by Jake Heggie, the American born in 1961. It is called *The Work at Hand*, and it is in three sections. The words are by the late Laura Morefield. This is one of those works that describe death by cancer. Heggie has composed two versions of it: one for voice, cello, and piano, and one for voice, cello, and orchestra. We heard the former, of course. Joining Barton and Moore onstage was Anne Martindale Williams, the principal cello of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra.

Heggie's piece is angry and rhapsodic. It is (naturally) full of lamentation. There is chromatic wailing. There is anguish and anxiety. Eventually, there is elegy. Some of the music is "easy listening," but none of it is trite. And Heggie has crafted the piece with skill, for the three instruments (counting the voice). *The Work at Hand* is moving—and not just because the subject is automatically moving.

From a technical point of view, Barton was not perfect in this piece. She had a faulty onset or two. But musically and vocally, she was unimpeachable. She sang clearly, straightforwardly, and feelingly. Like Marilyn Horne, for one, she is adept at singing in English (which not all native speakers are, strangely enough). At one point in the piece, she turned on oratorio-like solidity and power. This was highly effective. Playing the cello, Williams was a second singer. She played, or sang, searingly. Pardon the cliché, but it is the right word.

Let me make a confession, for the purpose of praising Heggie: I have never disliked his music, finding it competent and pleasant, at

a minimum—but I have sometimes found it innocuous. A little empty or unnourishing. In any case, *The Work at Hand* is substantial and powerful, a signal achievement.

Barton and Moore closed their printed program with Dvořák's *Gypsy Songs*, which were spirited, soulful, and winning. Frankly, I stopped reviewing, mentally, and sat back and listened. Between songs, a man said to his wife, "That's a good pianist." He certainly is. This makes a big difference in a voice recital.

Called back for an encore, Barton announced that she was going to sing her favorite hymn: "His Eye Is on the Sparrow," arranged by Jay Ivey. She sang it with utter sincerity. Odd as this may sound, I believe it took some courage to sing a hymn—and talk about it—in front of a New York audience (which is presumably secular, and apt to snicker at hymns). Not content with that, Barton sang a spiritual, "Ride On, King Jesus," also arranged by Ivey. (Price used to close recitals with the arrangement by Hall Johnson.) She ended with a big ol' glorious high note on the name "Jesus."

Like you, possibly, I have heard voice recitals my entire life—many hundreds. Thanks to the music, the singing, the playing, and the overall spirit, this was one of the best.

Behzod Abduraimov gave a program in Weill Recital Hall. He is the young pianist—born in 1990—from Uzbekistan. His program was a virtuosic one, beginning with the four ballades of Chopin. For years now, I have knocked the "completeness craze." Things are played in sets, even when they are not intended to be played that way. In recent years, lots of pianists have played the four ballades, one after the other. It is getting so that to play one ballade seems almost wrong—which is absurd.

Anyway, Abduraimov is an endearing young man. He takes the stage almost apologetically. At the keyboard, he hunches his shoulders, which, in mere mortals, results in tightness. Not just a shoulder-huncher, he is a lip-biter. And a head-shaker. And a nose-breather. Sometimes, he sings, not just with his fingers, but with his voice, Gould-style.

To play Chopin's ballades, a pianist needs to be both a technician and a poet. Both an athlete and a bard. Abduraimov qualifies. In the main, his playing was sensible and sure. Ballades Nos. 2 and 4 have similar beginnings. They should be played smoothly, glassily—almost magically. From Abduraimov, these beginnings were not quite right. In the codas of the four ballades, Abduraimov was a little tight and constrained. (Too much hunching?) But he was generally satisfying, and in the final ballade he showed fire, which was exciting.

The ballades took up the first half of the recital. The second half began with two impromptus of Schubert—the one in G-flat major, which is like a song, and universally beloved, and the one in E flat, which features tripping triplets. I'll never forget the way Horowitz played the G-flat major. I heard him do it when he was old and I was young. The Impromptu in E flat, I think of as Murray Perahia's encore: it has been his first encore for decades.

The Impromptu in G flat should be limpid, glassy, and somewhat otherworldly. It was not like that from Abduraimov. But the E-flat was thoroughly admirable: bold, lyrical, and committed.

Last on the program was Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit*, which very few can pull off. You need to be a wizard—both with your fingers and, in a way, with your imagination. Abduraimov pulled the piece off. The second movement, "Le gibet," was not his best. It failed to tantalize. But the last movement, the famous (or infamous) "Scarbo," was phenomenal.

Abduraimov played one encore, a piece closely associated with Horowitz: Scriabin's Etude in C-sharp minor, Op. 2, No. 1. I don't believe that the young man understands the etude's structure or thread. But he is a gifted and brilliant fellow, whom it will be a pleasure to hear for years to come, and whom it has been a pleasure to hear for several years already.

Alan Gilbert, the music director of the New York Philharmonic, will step down from his post after the 2016–17 season. So the question is, Who will succeed him? Or, maybe better, Who *should* succeed him? I have a shortlist of about five. On it is Sakari Oramo, the Finnish conductor. I have been pushing him for years.

He is not exactly under a bushel: today, he is the chief conductor of the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic and the BBC Symphony Orchestra. But I have always felt he should have an inarguably major podium.

He guested the New York Philharmonic, devoting the first half of the concert to his home composer, Sibelius. The opening work was a relative rarity: *The Oceanides*, a tone poem from 1914. Oramo was just like Sibelius, and just like the piece: composed, balanced, and sure. Listening to this performance, you might have thought, "How can it be otherwise?"

After the tone poem came the violin concerto. The soloist was Frank Peter Zimmermann—who made some unusual sounds at the beginning of the concerto. They were not quite of this world. And they were right. As the first movement progressed, Zimmermann's technique was not immaculate. Some of his intonation was iffy; sometimes his sound "spread," unduly. But he was always interesting and often compelling. He played much of the first movement with a cold fury. Oramo conducted in a manner compact yet free, which is exactly what is needed.

The second movement, the slow movement, was not exemplary. Zimmermann was short on beauty. The music can be much more *aching*. But he was good enough. Oramo was very good, breathing beautifully. He began the final movement with the *tempo giusto*, which is not easy, for many, to arrive at. Zimmermann was alive, with a focused sound. And this movement had the impact it should.

The audience was wild in its appreciation, and Zimmermann provided an encore: Bach, the last movement of his Sonata in A minor. The concerto had been very good. But it had not prepared me for how well Zimmermann would play his Bach. The Bach was controlled, fleet, and beautiful. And thrilling, actually. Zimmermann had complete mastery over the piece (though he did not smother it). And he was *loud*. The violin filled Avery Fisher Hall, an acoustically unfriendly place, everyone says.

There was a symphony after intermission, the Brahms Second. Oramo was elegant, natural, and musical. There was some bad playing, however. The horns were shaky, and many entrances, from everyone, were botched. The conductor may well have been responsible for this latter problem. But it did little harm to the overall performance, which was an example of honest music-making—music-making free of artifice (and at the same time not bland).

Furthermore, Oramo seems an amiable sort. Between movements, there was applause, and Oramo did not pull a Riccardo Muti: he did not glare, shush, or rebuke. He smiled, warmly.

Next door at Alice Tully Hall, Joshua Bell played a recital. He is an American violinist, as you know, and he was partnered by a British pianist, Sam Haywood. Their program consisted of sonatas by Beethoven, Grieg, and Brahms, plus the Rhapsody No. 1 of Bartók. The first of their encores was a (transcription of a) Chopin nocturne. Bell said, "My apologies to the pianists out there . . ."

I could review his recital in detail, and would enjoy it very much. I could speak of the violinist's intensity, and lyricism, and structural sense, and precision, and musical instinct, and versatility. This was a stupendous recital. But I have reviewed Bell many times, and perhaps I could confine myself to a general statement. It occurs to me that Bell is in the unusual position of being quite famous, for a classical musician, and at the same time underrated. Celebrity can obscure a musician's worth, funnily enough. It is my impression that some people regard Bell as a pretty boy with a nose for publicity. He may be that—but he is also a wonderful, sometimes flawless, sometimes great violinist. On this particular night, Bell was totally alive, and he made *you* feel more alive, as you sat in your seat. He reminded you why you loved music in the first place. This is a considerable gift.

All was not harmonious in the seats, however. Late in the recital, two patrons had an altercation. (I could explain.) There were harsh words exchanged—including one starting with F—and I thought it might come to blows. One man said to the other—we were attending a violin recital, remember—"Don't be a rube at the symphony!" I loved that. There's nothing like the sophistication of the New York concert scene.

The media

Scandal, or lack thereof

by James Bowman

For just a moment I allowed myself to think that it could be the first sign of a turnaround in the media culture of the past forty years, or that by one of those mysterious shifts in the *température d'âme* that happen from time to time, there might now be a new tolerance, honor, and reason, and at least a partial abandonment of the scandal craze which has held our public life in thrall for nearly half a century. Of course that was too much to hope, but I could scarcely believe my eyes at the main headline above the fold in the Sunday *Washington Post*—the paper which, during Watergate and Vietnam, had itself done so much to create the addiction to scandal which has characterized the American media down to the present day. The headline read: "Defined by 38 Seconds," and was followed by the subhead: "Marine sniper in video scandal is remembered as greater than the clip that stalked him."

True, the online version of the story moved the scandal back up front in the headline: "For Marine who urinated on dead Taliban, a hero's burial at Arlington," but the piece was full of compassion for the formerly scandalous one, Marine Sergeant Rob Richards, who was demoted to corporal and discharged from service as a result of the scandal.

> Almost everything about war is complicated, messy, or morally fraught; in this case even more so. A Marine vilified by his country's leaders and court-martialed for "bringing discredit to the armed forces" would soon be buried at Arlington National Cemetery, the country's most hallowed ground. On this mid-February night before the funeral, dozens who knew Richards beyond those 38 seconds gathered to celebrate his life.

The implied question—was it fair to judge this man's life on the basis of a thirty-eight-second video?—was never answered in the article, but the implication was that it was not. In any case, the question had been raised.

This may have had to do with the immense popularity of Clint Eastwood's movie of the Chris Kyle story, *American Sniper*, or the murder trial and conviction of Kyle's killer in Texas at about the same time. Or maybe, because Richards's was a do-it-yourself scandal in which the incriminating video had been made by the men involved, the media couldn't take a proprietary interest in it and so had less of a stake than usual in pursuing it beyond the grave. Most likely, however, Richards himself had engineered his own transition from villain to victim by dying of an overdose of painkillers, said to be accidental. One story always guaranteed to get in the paper is anything on veterans' suicides, now said to be running at twenty-two a day. That, at least, is the number given in an article in the *Post* two years ago, though the paper's own "Fact Checker" column reamed Sarah Palin with "3 Pinocchios" when she repeated a similar claim with the mistaken implication that it applied particularly to veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq. But then, to the *Post* as

to other media grandees, Mrs. Palin commits scandal merely by existing.

And even if Rob Richards's death was accidental, it seems plausible that the same reason he urinated on a Taliban corpse was reason enough for him to have killed himself, if he had killed himself.

> There was a relentlessness to their war. But, on some days, there was also a joy to it. After shooting a Taliban fighter, Richards and [Sgt. Edward] Deptola would often slap hands. Sometimes Richards would do a little celebration dance. "To the average guy, you'd look like a complete psychopath," Deptola said. Over there, he said, "It made perfect sense." The down time between missions—recuperating and waiting for another assignment—was often the hardest part. "We'd be like crack addicts," Deptola recalled. "We were on that adrenaline drug. We'd get our high when we killed people, and the only way to get our high was to kill. We were honestly addicted to killing people." The more Taliban they killed, the more praise they received from the top brass. The commandant of the Marine Corps set aside a morning to have breakfast with them and laud them for their work. Richards's commanders recognized his battlefield valor by nominating him for a Bronze Star.

By this point in the article, it was clear that it was not, after all, a retreat from scandal culture on the part of the *Post* but yet another drearily predictable reproach to the politicians and generals who had sent these poor kill-addicts through the brutalizing processes of war in the first place and who, having taught them to delight in slaughter, then had the nerve to be surprised and censorious when they came back as psychos. The scandal was as great as ever and, in fact, even greater, since the privilege of victimhood had been used to transfer the guilt to those with the power to send men to war.

The implication of the claim that Richards was "a Marine vilified by his country's leaders and court-martialed for 'bringing discredit to the armed forces' " was that it was hypocritical of the country's leaders to have treated him in this way, since it was their own prosecution of the war that caused the poor man to do such a thing. So familiar by now is this media narrative that when "Jihadi John," the YouTube celebrity beheader of the Islamic State was unmasked as a computer science graduate from London named Mohammed Emwazi, the Islamic pressure group CAGE, run by an ex–Guantanamo detainee, was quick to announce that he had been "radicalized" only after being harassed by British security services. They knew that by the rules of scandal-ology, scandal committed by enlisted men or junior officers is routinely used to discredit someone higher up who must have made them do it—even, as in this case, by trying to prevent them from doing it.

But the media's posthumous exoneration of Rob Richards, such as it was, could also be taken as suggestive of a subtle change in the scandal culture, which has in recent years tended to alter its focus from crime *tout court*—or anything that can plausibly be represented as crime—and has concentrated instead on thought crime. For example, you only had to turn to the op-ed page on the same day that *The Washington Post* ran its regretful farewell to the late Mr. Richards to find Dana Milbank incandescent with outrage at some scandalously unthinkable thoughts which implicated the Governor of Wisconsin and hopeful Republican presidential candidate Scott Walker.

The thought in question hadn't actually been thought, let alone uttered, by Governor Walker himself but by Rudy Giuliani, at a dinner at which the Governor had been present. The former mayor of New York had claimed on this occasion to doubt that President Obama loved his country. Mr. Walker had neither agreed nor disagreed with Mr. Giuliani, but his silence, thought Mr. Milbank, had been a sin of omission so serious that it "ought to disqualify him as a serious presidential contender." Anyone familiar with Mr. Milbank's partisan sympathies would suspect that, for him, Governor Walker's real fault lay in having been so successful as the Republican governor of a Democratic-leaning state as to appear a greater threat to the Democrats' hold on the executive branch than any of his fellow GOP

candidates. Thus a scandal, even one as pathetic as this, was urgently required.

Mr. Milbank's efforts to drum one up were then seconded by a couple of *Post* reporters who proceeded to ask Mr. Walker if he believed that the President was a Christian. Scandalously, he answered that he had no information on that subject, had not spoken to the President about it, and was therefore not going to render an opinion. Mr. Milbank got another column out of that, in which he took the Governor's agnosticism as a dog-whistle to "the far-right fringe" that believes the President to be a secret Muslim—referencing the "furor" already allegedly caused by his silence in the face of Mr. Giuliani's impugning of the President's patriotism. Though Mr. Milbank had no trouble reading between the lines of Gov. Walker's noncommittal response to find the scandalous thoughts he assumed it masked, he called Mr. Giuliani "stupid" for finding in the balance of the President's public statements about America and its enemies a lurking dislike for the country that had elected him on a promise of change.

True, the allegation of such a dislike sounded improbable, but it was not as if it was based on nothing, as Fred Siegel pointed out on the *City Journal* website. In any case, it was not so self-evidently untrue as to put Governor Walker under the kind of obligation Mr. Milbank thought he was under to contradict him publicly. Both he and the *Post*'s editorialist charged Governor Walker with cowardice for not rebuking the former mayor. Others then weighed in with a charge of self-pity for his rebuke of the media for neglecting matters of substance in favor of "gotcha" questions like those about the President's religious beliefs. None of it served its intended purpose of discrediting Mr. Walker. If anything, his standing in the polls went up as a result. But it was a reminder to nostalgists like myself of that dim and distant day long ago when there was still something like honor in politics and thus certain things that it was considered at the least very bad democratic manners for politicians to say about each other—including, as it happens, allegations of cowardice—or about their country.

It might even have been a similar attack of nostalgia on Mr. Giuliani's part for a time when no President would have dreamed of criticizing his own country in front of foreigners, as Mr. Obama has developed a habit of doing, which led him to make his ill-considered remark in the first place.

He said as much in a column he wrote for *The Wall Street Journal*, in which he disavowed any intention of divining the secrets of Mr. Obama's mind or heart.

> Irrespective of what a president may think or feel, his inability or disinclination to emphasize what is right with America can hamstring our success as a nation. This is particularly true when a president is seen, as President Obama is, as criticizing his country more than other presidents have done, regardless of their political affiliation.

Not that that got him off the hook with the pro-Obama media, which swiftly went to work to find the further scandal they knew must be there in his attempts to explain and so render un-scandalous the earlier scandal. The *Post*'s Stakhanovite "Fact Checker," Glenn Kessler, seized upon his telling an interviewer for Fox News that, although he accepted that Mr. Obama was a patriot, "I don't hear from him what I heard from Harry Truman, what I heard from Bill Clinton, what I heard from Jimmy Carter, which is these wonderful words about what a great country we are, what an exceptional country we are." It was then the work of a moment to collect instances of the President's having said things of precisely the tendency that Mr. Giuliani claimed he didn't hear and so awarding the former mayor a maximum four "Pinocchios" for factual inaccuracy.

I wonder, by the way, if the cutesy "Pinocchio" designation, complete with a cartoon graphic of Collodi's wooden boy with the unnaturally prolonged nose, couldn't itself be considered an implied act of semi-deference to the long outmoded honorable principle that one gentleman did not accuse another of lying—at least not, to go even further back in our history, unless he was prepared to stake his life on it. The less robust and, er, courageous practice of awarding Pinocchios may also be

taken as a tacit recognition that neither lying by politicians nor the accusation of lying against them is to be considered as anything like so big a deal anymore as it once was.

Glenn Kessler professed to understand that, Pinocchio or no Pinocchio, he could hardly have been said to have discredited Mr. Giuliani's "opinion about the *tenor* of the President's remarks" (emphasis added). He might indeed have gone further and mentioned the obvious possibility that avowals of love for country might actually be more necessary for a politician who didn't love it than for one who did, or that there were occasions when the President's professed love of his country were only there to accompany his criticisms of it and thus create a sense of balance. That was perhaps *his* act of semi-deference to the old "water's edge" principle in restraint of criticism that the mayor was accusing the President of violating.

Such distant echoes of the old honor culture are everywhere when you know where to look for them. They are, I would say, present in the idea of scandal itself, at least as it used to be understood. As it happened, coincidentally with the would-be scandals of Governor Walker and Mayor Giuliani, the *Post* ran the first of two stories that, had they been about anybody but Hillary Clinton, must surely have disqualified him or her as "a serious presidential contender." As the headline to the second of these stories put it: "Foreign governments gave millions to foundation while Clinton was at State Dept." That would be The Bill, Hillary & Chelsea Clinton Foundation, now said to have assets of some $2 billion. And yet there was hardly a mention of this on the *Post*'s editorial or op-ed pages.

More promising for scandal connoisseurs was the news a few days later of Mrs. Clinton's having, while Secretary of State, improperly used a private email account rather than the government one required by her department's own regulations. There were some stern words uttered by the usually sympathetic media. "The public deserves answers, not stonewalling, from Hillary Clinton," thundered the *Post*. "Saturday Night Live" even performed a skit about it, though its mockery was directed rather at her ambition, her stiffness, her wonkishness, her sense of entitlement, and her cavalier attitude to critics rather than any suggestion of actual wrongdoing. The reaction among the media at large was typified by the more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger attitude of the *Post*'s Chris Cillizza, who wrote that "it reminds and reinforces for people many of the traits that they do not like in the Clintons"—such as that "they don't think the rules apply to them." It also reminds and reinforces for people the extent to which the rules *don't* apply to them, and Mrs. Clinton has been tacitly deemed to share in the immunization against further scandal her husband has enjoyed since the homeopathic dose of impeachment, now nearly two decades ago. But I wonder if, in the intervening period, big media's having come out as openly loyal to the Democratic party doesn't rather suggest that scandal can no longer apply to anyone but Republicans. It is unfortunate that there is no echo from the past to tell them that scandal ceases to be scandal when it can be discounted as no more than a further escalation of partisan rhetoric.

Books

Beckett two ways

by John Simon

If you are very famous, it's safe to assume that your letters will someday be published. Under the circumstances, they may have been written with at least one eye flirting with posterity, meaning a conscious aim at being publishable as literature. But if you are also modest, you will write simply and directly for the addressee alone, with no thought of literary effect. Yet even then, given who you are, you may still produce missives of historical, philosophical, psychological, and, however unintended, autobiographical interest.

Let me say of Samuel Beckett that, to his credit, his correspondence exhibits no such intellectual coquetry. *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*—in four hefty volumes, of which the fourth still awaits publication and the third is just out—are totally spontaneous and unpretentiously intended only for their recipients.[1] Anything beyond that is purely coincidental. This is their appeal or, as some might feel, their limitation.

The four-volume project by four editors is almost superhumanly dedicated, as the third volume formidably attests. These letters, from 1957 to 1965, in a tome of 771 pages, are part of the most extensive and rigorous editing of a correspondence I have ever encountered, carrying thoroughness to extraordinary, arguably obsessive, extremes.

George Craig is in charge of translations from the French and other French matters, which he discusses in his particular introduction. The apparent chief editor, Dan Gunn, offers introductory matter of the most comprehensive sort and is probably responsible for the majority of the copious footnotes. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck are, I am guessing, to be credited with most of the staggering archival research, yielding an awesome epistolary accumulation along with the most detailed descriptions of the format, ownership, and locations of the individual letters or postcards.

Beckett did not want his personal letters published and urged sticking exclusively to those having to do with his works—their writing, publication, reception, productions, misapprehensions, etc., and attendant negotiations.

But it is impossible to separate the letters that way without some overlapping elements.

This third volume covers the creation and performances of some of Beckett's best plays, usually referred to by their French titles, even if written in English, i.e., *All That Fall*, *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Happy Days*, among somewhat lesser others, and much about the struggles with the novel *Comment c'est* that involved the utmost toil.

Before one gets to the letters themselves, there are eighty pages of various introductory, historical, bibliographical, and procedural detail, this not including historical, bibliographical, and biographical material given at the start of every year covered, or the thirty-

1 *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: Volume 3, 1957–1965*, edited by George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn & Lois More Overbeck; Cambridge University Press, 771 pages, $50.

four miscellaneous pages at book's end, and not counting the proliferation of the many pages' worth of footnotes and bibliographical notes for every letter as well as the chronological tables for every year.

I mention all this in part as a warning to persons not so enthralled by Beckett as not to be put off by several things: the complete English translation following the French letters—the latter hard to skip if one has so much as a rudimentary French—and all those quasi-endless, often pedantically excessive footnotes in demandingly tiny print.

Altogether, these four books are probably meant primarily for academics, however helpful all such features as the "Profiles"—short biographies of the principal recipients—may be. And of course there is the matter of the athleticism required in hefting such stout volumes, hardly suitable for reading on buses, subways, or trains.

Well, what about the letters themselves? They abound, among other things, in attacks on, or at least complaints about, something or someone, very often the work or person of their writer. Self-criticism extends from doubt through distaste to detestation, as perhaps behooves this advocate of giving up and silence, who could not stop himself from contradicting them with his abundant oeuvre.

There is thus a remarkable self-contradiction or twofoldness—perhaps even a mischievous duplicity—at work in Beckett's published writings, as well as in these letters, and indeed in his very life. Why else write in two languages: as an Irishman (definitely not Englishman) and as an honorary Frenchman who spent most of his adult life in France, the twofoldness manifest equally in numerous quirks as in major dualities. Beckett could thus never resolve which he needed more, the goings-on in the city or the seclusion of the country, involving residences in both and a continual to and fro. Consider even, as I have been told by persons in the know, his pleasure in taking visitors to the Crazy Horse Saloon but seating himself with his back to the renowned nude dancers.

But the duality is clearest in the many revisions his works underwent, either during the actual writing or in their being partly or wholly rewritten at a later time, often under another title or even in another language. This may constitute a sign of disaffection with his works or with himself as both writer and human being. And that is where the letters become most useful, not only as illustrations of profound existential ambivalence, but also as implicit footnotes to his works, about which he always claimed to be totally puzzled and unable to comment either in conversation or in writing.

There is even a whimsical duality in the inexpensive car he eventually acquired, a Citroën Deux Chevaux (2 HP), echoed curiously in his wife's name, Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil. And what about his at one point very nearly getting rid of his beloved country house in Ussy-sur-Marne, just far enough from Paris?

Let me make clear that this review is not concerned with the many aspects of his varied correspondence, for a concise but excellent overview of which I heartily recommend Paul Muldoon's notice in *The Times Book Review* of December 12, 2014. It says more or less what I might have said, only less well, and includes also an amusing putdown of the *Collected Poems*, simultaneously published by Grove Press.

I myself want to concentrate on a leitmotiv that runs through the entire volume, which Muldoon characterizes as "fierce self-deprecation and disengagement" and cites as one pole of Beckett's "contradictory nature," the other being the "fastidiousness" of this "high priest of lessness." Although self-doubt features in most great writers, Muldoon observes, self-derogation in Beckett is much more flagrant.

My reason for this restrictive concentration is that it explains so much about Beckett's writing as well as about the heavy drinking which the Irish are proficient at, but, in his case, is especially pronounced. I will, however, include some other passages that particularly struck me. What I won't bother with is the astonishing number of his errors of grammar and spelling of all sorts in both French and English, including the misspelled names of close friends and some very famous persons. On the other

hand, there is wide-ranging interest in and sound observation about literature, music, and painting.

Beckett is not averse to near-repetition: to his American publisher, Barney Rosset, he complains, quoting from *Waiting for Godot*, about "this bitch of an earth," dating the letter "January 11th 1956 or rather 57." The next day, in a letter squarely dated 1956 to Richard Roud (whom he misspells as Round), he gripes, "So it goes on this turd of an earth." To a correspondent in June, by which time he gets the year right, he writes, "It is not difficult to know more about me than I do, self-defence has plunged my head in my hands." But it is not clear self-defense from whom.

On February 6, 1958, he writes his chief American director, Alan Schneider, "I must confess I feel the old tug to write in French again, where control is easier for me, and probably excessive. If my present presentiments are worth anything I probably won't succeed in writing in either. But I'll do my best." This is pretty much what became, years later, one of his most quoted lines: "You must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on." But why is self-control easier in French than in English? Perhaps because French was learned, English born into.

To the great English director George Devine, staging *Krapp's Last Tape*, he speculates about Krapp's appropriate facial expression as he listens: "Expressiveness in blankness sums it up, I think, if that means anything." There you have Beckett's essence: how to make something out of nothing, if such a thing can be done.

Robert Pinget, the young writer to whom Beckett was idol and mentor, writes: "Beckett wants to do something . . . Racinian. Can't manage it. Says that everything he comes up with is appallingly comical." Note the comical as appalling, or is it vice versa? Again, a good definition of Beckett's art.

Sam thanks Alan Schneider for a laudatory article and his "attachment for my dismal person and devotion to my grisly work." The life and the work mirror each other. To Rosset again, November 23, 1958: "The only sensible course is for me not to open my mouth to man or beast on any matter remotely concerning me." In other words, silence as protection from self-deception and delusion.

In a letter from the country house in Ussy: "I am here nearly all the time now, st[r]uggling feebly to 'go on.' Ce n'est pas une vie, but it's the nearest I ever got to one." Can we call it existential minimalism? On April 2, 1959, in response to an invitation to attend the awarding of an honorary degree by Trinity College in Dublin, "I have no clothes but an old brown suit, if that's not good enough, they can stick their Litt.D. up among their piles." Pure passive aggression.

To Barbara Bray, the BBC Drama Producer, a former girlfriend and lifelong best pal, he tells on December 1, 1959 how he spends his time at Ussy: "Often play chess alone in the evening with the bottle beside me and know of few less unpleasant occupations." There is a certain ghostly modesty about that "few" instead of a "no."

He is, quite rightly, disgusted with "director's theater," as much practiced in Germany: "I dream sometimes of all German directors of plays with perhaps one exception united in one with his back to the wall and me shooting a bullet into his balls every five minutes till he loses his taste for improving authors." This, provoked by one Walter Henn, is Beckett writing to his faithful American director, Alan Schneider.

To his editor at Grove Press and frequent translator, Richard Seaver, Beckett writes on January 30, 1960: "I am not a critic, unless possibly the world's worst, and have no public comment to make on other writers." Ah, but private comments abound in these letters, sometimes favorable but more often stinging. About the American Post Office suing Rosset for publishing "Mrs. [sic] Chatterley's Lover," a "singularly unexciting work." About *Doctor Zhivago*: "I have finished Pasternak with mixed feelings, which is more than I hoped for." Or "Don't understand a word of Wittgenstein. Had boots brushed once in Zagreb with no feeling but mounting dislike of bootblack." Again, "I find Arthur Adamov neither gentle

nor charming, but he may well be both." "I read *Passage to India* a long time, vague recollection like swallowing fine sand." "Elie Faure on Egyptian Art. Awful." Brecht: "I went to see *Die Mutter*. Unendurable." And so on.

To Barbara Bray: "Can't wish happiness on me, I'm not fitted for it." To another: "Whole days without speaking to anyone. I don't even talk to myself any more. From time to time I let out a bellow." And in the same letter of May 9, 1960: "I hammer and hammer. Hard as iron, the words. I'd like them in dust. Like the spirit." To Bray again, July 4, 1960: "Feel myself going completely off the rails not that I was ever on any I suppose." Punctuation clearly not something to concern oneself with.

To the Dutch writer Jacoba van Welde, he mocks: "I am as hollow as an old radish. I'd like to spend two months in the country digging holes, filling up each one as I go with the earth from the next one." To Barbara again, October 10, 1960: "I know I might as well be saying this to the wind and the leaves and so I suppose I am, like everything I ever said, having never grasped the nature of human conversation." Pretty frightening, that, however much a hyperbole. And, on the 28th, "Wish I could renounce writing once and for all and just potter about for the rest of the . . . time. Perhaps start reading a little again." Why that ellipsis? Had he written "life," it would have implied that dreaded thing, death.

"Genet sent me his *Paravents*. Not for me I fear from a quick look." How would it have been, one wonders, on a slower look? Not one of Genet's best in any case. About TV, he wrote "it's a medium for fleas." But just as with radio, which he excoriated at first and then wrote regularly for, so with television. He could be curiously adaptable—or is it merely changeable?

For an ardent fan, the novelist Kay Boyle, he returns to an old theme: "I know creatures are supposed to have no secrets from their authors, but I'm afraid mine for me have nothing else." Beckett is no slouch at shirking responsibility for his creations. Or his mistakes: What about the accent on the admired Céline, which he omits? Similarly, he loves Theodor Fontane's wonderful novel *Effi Briest*, but misspells it his life long as Effie.

To Schneider again, on November 7, 1962, he writes, "I haven't read the critics and don't intend to read any more notices of my work. Friendly or not it's all misunderstanding. Hobson for as usual, Tynan as usual against."

To his good friend and frequent correspondent, the Israeli painter Avigdor Arikha, he confides on April 25, 1963, mostly in French: "I am doing nothing. Drift about, my head miles away. Oh if only I could never make another move."

This requires no comment.

To Laurence Harvey, not the actor but a professor and Beckett scholar, Sam wrote: "All my critical work, including Joyce and Proust essays, was à mon corps defendant [wrung out of me], which may go to explain, if not to excuse, its prevailing tone of cantankerous overstatement." This too may be a slight overstatement. And he continued: "I would of course be at your disposal at any time, for talk I hope about any old thing under the sun but me." Not very helpful to someone intending to write a book about him, but true enough.

And here is the entire letter of condolence to Alan Schneider, upon the death of his father:

> I know your sorrow and that for the likes of us there is no ease of the heart to be had from words or reason and that in the very assurance of sorrow's fading there is more sorrow. So I offer you only my deeply affectionate and compassionate thoughts and wish for you only that the strange thing may never fail you,whatever it is, that gives us the strength to live on and on with our wounds.

This review has bypassed much, notably most of the many letters about theater to producers, directors, and actors, many of whom became close friends, usually but not always about works by Beckett they were involved with. That in itself could easily add up to a piece at least as long as this one, and I can only hope that someone else writes or has already written it.

Spots of intensity

Clive James
Poetry Notebook: Reflections on the Intensity of Language.
Liveright, 234 pages, $24.95

reviewed by Micah Mattix

The subtitle of Clive James's *Poetry Notebook*, added for the American edition, is "Reflections on the Intensity of Language." This is because it is the "intensity of language," not formal unity, James writes in the volume's introduction, that marks "the real difference between poetry and prose."

This doesn't mean that James is soft on form—or not entirely. Technique, he writes, "will always be part of the poet's schooling," and formal unity is a poem's "binding energy," even if it's not "the most important of its energies." What matters most is a phrase, a line, or a stanza that sounds like nothing you've ever heard before and will never forget. This is what James calls a poem's "moment"—an incalculable, "unforgettable" spot of "concentrated meaning."

The result is a book of "moments" and moment-makers, and, unsurprisingly, James is an entertaining and often convincing guide. "There was never a more burningly focused romance," James writes, than Louis MacNeice's "Meeting Point"—a poem that "tapped into the perennial British conviction . . . that heterosexual love between adults should reach its emotional apotheosis at a public meeting point where the most intense thoughts must stay unspoken." Michael Donaghy's "Machines" is "at least as well built as either the harpsichord or the bicycle celebrated in the narrative." And a single passage from James Merrill's "The Broken Home" was "enough to prove that a masterful voice had arrived."

Short discussions of many of the major poets of twentieth century are sprinkled liberally throughout the volume. T. S. Eliot comes in for high praise, as do Robert Frost, Seamus Heaney, and Philip Larkin. (Larkin's "tonal range," James writes, stretched "effortlessly from colloquial punch to high-flying sonority." He "gets the whole truth of life's transience" into his work.)

A particular pleasure of *Poetry Notebook*, at least for American readers, is James's discussion of Australian poetry. Both Les Murray and Peter Porter get an entire essay each, but we are also introduced to the lesser-known W. J. Turner and Stephen Edgar, among others. Edgar's "Man on the Moon" is almost "perfect," James writes, and James McAuley's "Because" is a "miniature masterpiece."

The volume also looks at moment-failures. James argues that no one reads Dunstan Thompson (1918–1975) anymore because he became enamored with the machinery of poetry itself. Thompson's long poem "Largo," James writes, is a "majestic form, one of his own devising . . . with a scarcely faltering interplay between the hexameters, tetrameters, and trimeters." The "half rhymes are handled with an infallibly musical tact." "But," James writes, "he couldn't do anything definite with the subject matter."

More provocatively, James argues that Ezra Pound's *Cantos* is one of the most overrated poems of the twentieth century. The problem is that it lacks specificity. "What Pound did," James writes, "instead of specificity was to toy with a kit of parts, each of them producing not so much more than a blurred suggestion of neoclassical architecture." While he loved Pound when he was younger, James realized later, he tells us, that "the key requirement of admiring him was to be insufficiently receptive to anyone else."

James loves zingers, and there are lots of quotable ones in these essays in addition to the one above. "E.E. Cummings," he writes, "was as hot against materialist society as only a poet living on a trust fund can be." The loss of the poet Keith Douglas in the Second World War was "especially piquant . . . because dozens of surrealists survived to help make a fashion of not knowing what they were talking about." "Limping numbers from poets writing in free verse are presumably meant," he writes, "but limping numbers from poets who are avowedly *trying* to write in set forms must be mere clumsiness."

But there are also a few missteps. James frequently makes the distinction between "formal" and "informal" poetry in the volume. The difference between these two kinds of poetry, he

tells us, is the way they "join" up the moments of a poem. By "informal" poetry, James means free verse, and while he is aware, of course, that good free verse contains identifiable formal characteristics (how else would it join the moments?), he too often throws his hands up at what those might be. He mentions Eliot's "interior echoes" and Yeats's "complex simplicity," but elsewhere he seems stumped. There have been "so many successful informal poems," James writes, "that we must contemplate the possibility that there is such a thing as an informal technique." What that "informal technique" might be, and how it is *categorically* different from a "formal" one (it's not), James doesn't say.

Elsewhere his otherwise careful close readings go amiss. He writes, for example, that R. F. Langley, a student of Jeremy Prynne, succeeded in "perfecting the kind of poem" that avoids "any hints of the conventionally poetic" and quotes the following stanza as proof:

> We leave unachieved in the
> summer dusk. There are no
> maps of moonlight. We find
> peace in the room and don't
> ask what won't be answered.

James writes: "Impeccably bland, . . . its lack of melody exactly matched by its lack of rhythm," Langley's poem has "shaken off all trace of the technical heritage." But, of course, it hasn't. We have metaphor, alliteration, and parallelism in the above stanza alone.

James also misquotes the stanza (as did a *Guardian* obituarist, from whom James copied it), leaving out the line "Things/ stand further off," which, of course, uses personification. The poem also uses assonance. I'm not interested in defending Langley, but his fault is not in successfully escaping poetic language, as James would have us believe, but in trying to escape and failing.

In another essay, he writes that poetry is poetry if it elicits some emotional response. "We can tell that it is poetry," he writes, "by the way that we react." Of course, all good poetry should touch us, but not everything that touches us—or touches other people—is good poetry. Mary Jo Bang is proof of that.

But all in all James hits the mark far more than he misses it and does what all great poetry critics do: he makes us want to read it.

Attention crisis

Matthew Crawford
The World Beyond Your Head.
Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 320 pages, $26

reviewed by Ian Tuttle

It is now more unlikely than ever before that you will read this review in one sitting (if, that is, you read it at all). The subway conductor is announcing a delay, your cell phone is buzzing, a television is flickering; focusing, for a page, for a paragraph, has never been harder.

We are living through, says Matthew Crawford, a "crisis of attention," and while he is not the first to comment upon it, his new book, *The World Beyond Your Head: On Becoming an Individual in an Age of Distraction*, is among the most thorough, wide-ranging, and deeply considered analyses of this aspect of our cultural moment.

Crawford is a product of the University of Chicago's prestigious Committee on Social Thought who forsook the Ivory Tower for the mechanic's garage (he currently operates a motorcycle repair shop in Richmond, Virginia, and, for propriety's sake, is also a fellow at the University of Virginia's Institute for the Advanced Study of Culture). In 2009 he published the much-feted *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work*, which contested the entrenched distinction between "doing" and "thinking," arguing that the devaluation of skilled manual labor had cut off from our pursuit an entire form of human flourishing—and impoverished philosophy in the process.

The World Beyond Your Head follows from the questions asked in *Shop Class* and ultimately deepens and broadens its thesis (though one need not have read the latter to appreciate the former). To become skilled, whether in motorcycle repair or mandolin performance, requires *attending* to an object (motorcycle, mandolin) that makes, as a consequence of material and

design, particular demands to which we must submit if we are to be successful (you cannot play a mandolin like a marimba). But, according to Crawford, the Enlightenment project has in fact been the project of increasingly estranging ourselves from "the world beyond your head."

Because the "illegitimate" political authority from which modern liberalism sought to free us in the epoch-making days of Bacon, Hobbes, Locke, et al. made claims to power based on knowledge, the freedom we claim must be based on not just a political but also an epistemic principle. It follows that freedom depends on standards of truth not present in an independently existing world *out there* but in our own minds, which mediate between self and world through "representations"; to *know* becomes really a matter of knowing our own minds. And since "attention is the faculty through which we encounter the world directly," as we have retreated from the world, the role of attention has diminished. Crawford finds the most forceful articulation of our modern self-understanding in Kant: "Autonomy of the will is the property of the will through which it is a law to itself independently of all properties of the objects of volition." The complete removal of the person—ahem, "rational being," for Kant—from conditioning circumstances has resulted in the "heroic project of open-ended, ultimately groundless self-making." And the consequences of that have not been happy.

Consider machine gambling. In a fascinating (and horrifying) chapter entitled, "Autism as a Design Principle: Gambling," Crawford shows how the anxieties of Kantian autonomy are manifest among machine gambling addicts, who become hooked on the closed-circuit reliability of machine gambling as an escape from the oppressive burdens of our new "freedom." "The sense of control that one enjoys in autistic pseudo-action"—whether via gambling machines or video games—"is an escape from the contingencies and frustrations that one contends with in dealing with the recalcitrant material of the real world, including other people."

And when it comes to people ("Encountering Things" constitutes the focus of the book's first part, "Other People" the second), we are no better adjusted. "The idea that you yourself can be the source of the norms by which you justify yourself"—the "cult of sincerity"—has made genuine relationships well-nigh impossible by making "individuality" a product of strictly internal processes. The "freedom" of complete self-determination only frees selves everywhere to wilt under the pressure of "the vague and unending project of having to become one's fullest self" with no recourse to the "cultural jigs"—marriage, church, *polis*—that in a previous era gave our lives structure. Our hypercompetitive "culture of performance" is a product of this, as is our culture of performance art, in which people mitigate the challenge of relating by eschewing genuine interactions for staged substitutes (e.g., Facebook message, not face-to-face meeting). Of course, in such encounters other people are never more than instruments toward our own needs, and we are always masked. And a society of poseurs (or—how's this for provocation?—a society of hipsters) is a "flattened" society in which everyone regards everyone else with "polite separation" because we are too frightened to stake anything of ourselves and—as good autonomous, nonjudgmental, liberal democrats—not allowed to demand anything of others. The only psychic respite for such fragile selves is to lean on one another, whereby a herd is born. Needless to say, manipulable masses have never long kept a healthy republic.

All of this and more is the result of the "redescription of the human being, and of our basic situation in the world"—effectively, that we are brains in ornate vats—required by the Enlightenment. Thus, writes Crawford, "the philosophical project of this book is to *reclaim the real*" (italics original). Predictably, that does not admit of a twelve-step program. Rather, since a philosophical reorientation occasioned our predicament, a philosophical reorientation is required to correct it. Enter *eros*.

The ancient insight that human beings are, fundamentally, *erotic* beings, beings who long to transcend their own boundaries, has been denied by our philosophy of autonomy, which is a philosophy of radical self-sufficiency. By recognizing our erotic nature, the world becomes available to us again because we allow ourselves to be drawn to it. Attention is erotic by nature.

"All I know" of concentration, wrote T. S. Eliot in 1952, "is that if you are interested enough and care enough, then you concentrate."

Re-enter *Shop Class*. The motorcycle mechanic, the short-order cook, the glass-blower, the hockey player—all strive toward an excellence that is only made possible by acknowledging that they are being drawn to something beyond themselves, then submitting to its demands. When a mechanic is searching out the hobgoblin that is causing a car to stall, he must submit to the car *as it is*; he must defer to a world outside of his head. This is at the heart of attending: "The Latin root of our English word 'attention' is *tendere*, which means to stretch or make tense. External objects provide an attachment point for the mind; they pull us out of ourselves." Against the edges of external objects we sharpen ourselves into true individuals.

And, crucially, "It is in an encounter between the self and the brute alien otherness of the real that beautiful things become possible." Beautiful is the excellence of the surfer mastering a wave; beautiful, too, is the excellence of the chef (as the success of televised cooking shows attests). Each is a form of human flourishing made possible only by allowing oneself to be drawn outward to encounter the world.

This erotic ethic can restore our encounters with other people, too. Where our current egalitarianism-on-principle "is content to posit rather than to see the humanity of its beneficiaries," recognizing the mechanic's superiority over me in matters of bit sockets and brake fluid prompts me to recognize his humanity. This posture of attentiveness toward other persons offers an alternative to the American political Left's fetish for democracy and the American political Right's sometimes-unthinking paeans to free markets. (Some of these explicit connections come out in the endnotes, which the attentive reader should not ignore; they include, besides useful clarifications and qualifications, several amusing digressions.)

Although other writers have commented on Crawford's subject—at a remove, Neil Postman and Robert Putnam; more recently, Thomas de Zengotita, Sherry Turkle, and Nicholas Carr—the sweep of Crawford's treatment is original and provocative, and invites conversation, whether with scholars of the Enlightenment who might take issue with his anthropology or with metaphysicians who might desire to push beyond Crawford's phenomenological account. Similarly, educators, politicians, urban planners, interior decorators, and many others would benefit from thinking carefully about the problem Crawford has identified and the (partial) remedies he proposes.

The World Beyond Your Head is an enormously rich book, a timely and important reflection on an increasingly important subject.

Pay attention.

A master's minor works

Bernard Bailyn
Sometimes an Art.
Knopf, 320 pages, $28

reviewed by Joshua Dill

Bernard Bailyn is one of the most influential historians of the American Revolution of the last half-century; at ninety-two, he is the topic's elder statesman. With books like *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, *Voyagers to the West*, and *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson*, the Harvard professor reshaped the study of colonial and revolutionary America, gaining critical and popular acclaim with prizes like the Pulitzer for history, which he won twice, and the National Book Award for history. Whether Bailyn is worth reading is a settled question: the answer is yes. Whether everything he has written is worth reading is another question, one raised by his interesting but heterogeneous new collection of essays, *Sometimes an Art.*

The new book is divided into two broad sections: the first comprising pieces on historiography—"history and the struggle to get it right"—and the second focusing on "the peripheries of the early British Empire," a longtime focus of Professor Bailyn's. That the two topics are not really analogous (one an abstract conceptual concern, one a geographical and temporal subject) reflects the somewhat hodgepodge nature of the book; the nine pieces within were often written for specific occasions, and include

lectures from the period 1971–2007 (one already reproduced in a 1974 book) and scholarly papers dating back to 1954. The book thus reads less like a coherent collection of essays than a minor volume from the Complete Works of Bernard Bailyn.

Historiography and the teaching of history have long interested Professor Bailyn; indeed, they have already been the topic of a book-length interview he gave under the title *On the Teaching and Writing of History*, and the remark that provides the new book's title—that history is "sometimes an art, always a craft, never a science"—has shown up several times before, including in the title of an additional previously published interview. Overarching historiographical concerns occupy the first essays in *Sometimes an Art*: how to ensure that historical writing takes into account the broad context of past realities and worldviews, how to avoid the anachronistic assumption that past events are best understood by their effects on the present (thereby producing a "whiggish foreshortening" of history), and whether it is possible to introduce moral concerns into historical scholarship without falling into fruitless condemnations on the one hand or slippery circumstantial exculpations on the other. Above all, Bailyn gives the impression of being a scholar whose expertise and comfort in his subject area are so deep that he is completely unflapped by new developments in his field: quantitative research methods, demographic study, the concept of cultural systems with centers and peripheries, the *Annales* school's focus on the *mentalités* of the past, or postmodern concerns. He discusses these trends with such equanimity and fairness that it nearly amounts to a fault. His ruminative historiographical essays, while clearly demonstrating wisdom and understanding, frequently fall into a soft safe zone. Consider the conclusion to one essay: good historical accounts "will incorporate anecdote but they will not be essentially anecdotal; they will include static, 'motionless' portrayals of situations, circumstances, and points of view on the past, but they will be essentially dynamic; they will concentrate on change, transition, and the passage of time; and they will show how major aspects of the present world were shaped—acquired their character—in the process of their emergence." Avoiding extremes, choosing the happy medium—Aristotle and Goldilocks would approve. And in a piece on the Du Bois Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database (basically an informational note appearing in a scholarly journal and barely meriting inclusion in a collection of essays), Bailyn remarks that "the deepest problem presented by the database, it seems to me, is how to understand the Atlantic slave trade as both history and memory. . . . Perhaps history and memory in the end may act usefully upon each other." It is hard to disagree with a conclusion so devoid of argumentative force.

Bailyn is much more interesting when he discusses how the creative energy a historian needs in order to transmute bare facts into a work of history can bleed into a powerfully emotional investment in his subject matter. Far from being a stuffy denizen of the archives, a historian is often "a romantic soul, imagining, self-dramatizing." Bailyn introduces a number of historians whom he finds especially compelling, from the American historian Charles McLean Andrews, whose "emotional and intellectual roots lay deep in the late-nineteenth-century struggles over the Anglo-Saxon identity of the United States in the face of the great eastern and southern European immigrations," to the classicist Ronald Syme, about whom he remarks, "one can only guess what subjective meaning the story of the Roman provincials' absorption into the cosmopolis of Rome may have had to this New Zealander who rose through the ranks at Oxford." A similar phenomenon is observed in "The Losers," a survey of historical writing on the Loyalists of the American Revolution. The topic, initially subject matter for political polemics in America and Britain, eventually came to the attention of disgruntled conservatives and became a vehicle for concerns about the English character of the United States and the unity of the "English-speaking race." Of the nineteenth-century American essayist Sydney George Fisher, Bailyn writes that the loyalists' plight "offered him intellectual control over the social dislocations of his own time, for in his identification with them he found a means of removing himself from the present

and associating himself with an original, authentic American tradition." That is a brilliant and masterfully phrased insight, almost cutting to whoever among us has nurtured sentimental sympathies with the forgotten causes found in history books.

This leads into the second part of the book, made up of essays concerned more directly with particular historical contexts. In one piece, Bailyn reconsiders his monograph on Thomas Hutchinson, the reviled final colonial governor of Massachusetts, useful if you'd like a thematic summary of that book. Part II is anchored, though, by two solid essays discussing the peripheries of the British Imperial world—America, Scotland, and Australia. Here Bailyn investigates some of his most cherished topics: what are the conditions of life and society in such far-flung lands? What is it about cultural marginalization that can produce efflorescences like the Scottish Enlightenment or the American Revolution? The insights are free-flowing; each essay contains well-considered concepts that recast the reader's understanding of colonial history. Bailyn discusses life on the edge: the "loss, isolation, and cultural deprivation" of colonial pioneers; a brutal daily experience "violent beyond the measure of British life;" and their "awareness of cultural marginality" and concomitant cultivation of gentility, that "self-conscious civility of ambitious colonial societies." Here, too, though, the conclusions are sometimes lackluster. On the United States and Australia: "However one judges these modes of emergence from colonial status to independence, they are different, and they have left deep and different impressions on subsequent history." To make it your conclusion that different things in different places are different and have had different effects is almost to play a practical joke on the reader.

For all the strengths of these essays, it is not always easy to see who the intended reader of this book is: is it the civic-minded lay reader, the history aficionado, the graduate student pondering historiography, the scholar of British Imperial history? Even the reader hoping for good substantial history is apt to be a bit puzzled. Picking up a book of "nine essays on history," one somehow expects nine glittering insights, held together like the atoms in a diamond. Instead, *Sometimes an Art* is loose, ruminative, balanced, and unpointed, composed of essays that repeatedly essay too little.

This is too bad, since Bailyn has already proven himself a skilled essayist, capable of writing a book of essays that is short but forceful, well-grounded but daring in its arguments, personal but authoritative—the shining example being the impressive *To Begin the World Anew.* This collection of five essays on the "genius and ambiguities of the American Founders" is a masterful work of history that is fully accessible to an intelligent lay reader. It's a short book, a concise 150 pages excluding notes and bibliography, and one of its great strengths is that it is genuinely essayistic. The "ambiguities" of the founding generation—the dazzling creativity that emerged from a provincial society; the inner contradictions of Jefferson's thought; the evolution of Benjamin Franklin's popular image and his self-dramatizations; the paradoxes of the Federalist Papers' composition and reception—obviously fascinate Bailyn, and he lets his mind play over them, allowing himself incidental comments, inconclusive contemplations, and aperçus, but at the same time consistently advancing distinctive, thought-provoking, and convincing arguments. Creatively, he spans the divide between hard factual history and the realms of culture and society by examining evidence from the fine arts and architecture, using one essay to compare both the delicate portraits of English aristocracy to the ruder, more rigid pictures of their American counterparts, and also American country houses to the palaces of the English elite. These essays are interesting, but more than that they are filled with purpose: they demanded to be written and deserve to be read.

Bailyn's new book contains plenty of interesting discussions, but its occasional pieces are gathered more for someone who is looking for commentary on a specific topic or is a Bailyn completist. For the general reader who wants to taste the best of Bailyn, to read his argumentative essays, or even to jump straight into his historical work—there are better and more logical places to start.